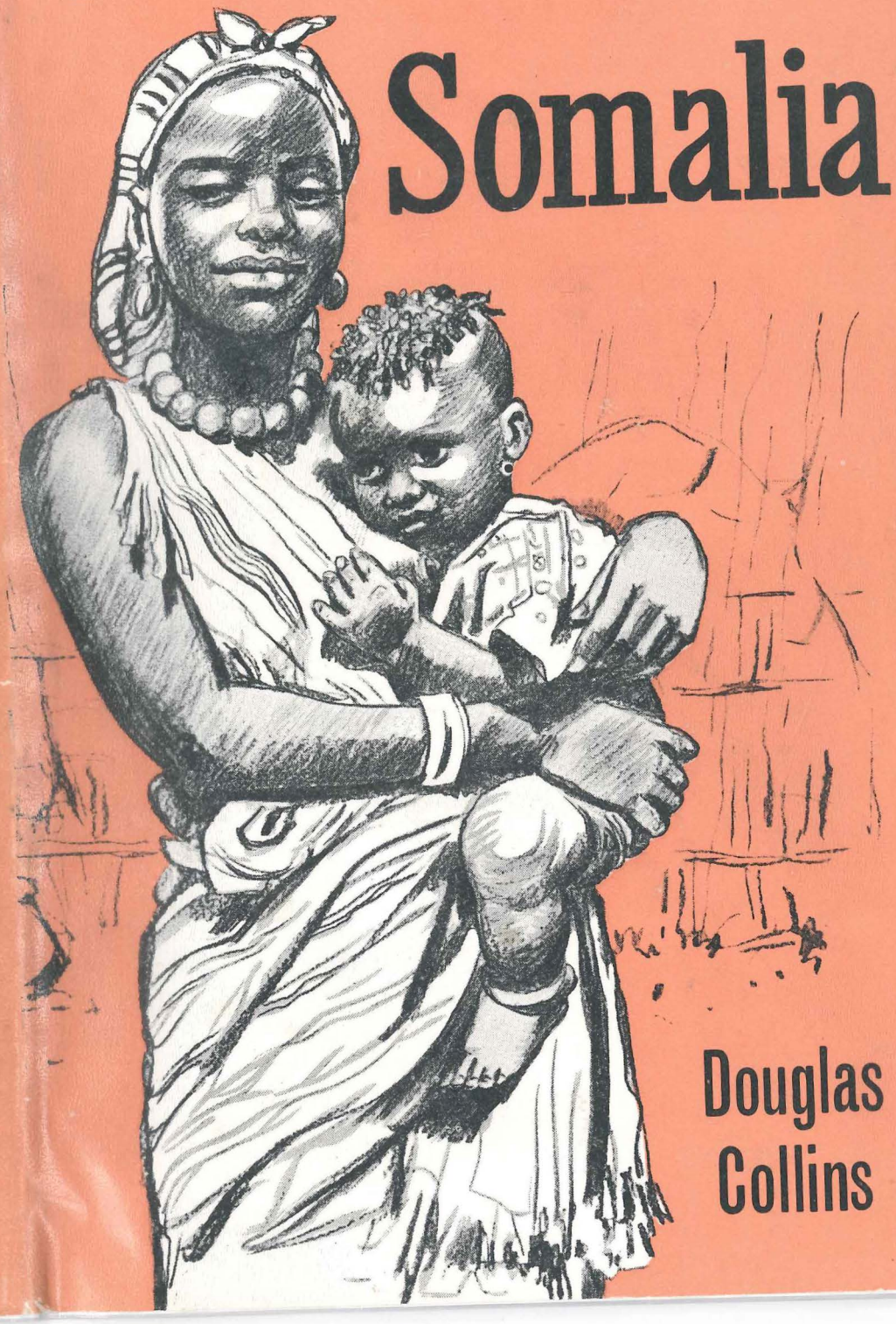
A TEAR FOR Somalia



Douglas Collins

Notes on the Author

Douglas Collins was British born but calls himself Somali by adoption. He joined the Army in 1939 and after being evacuated from Dunkirk in 1940 was commissioned in the South Staffordshire Regiment and went to Africa in 1941. For ten years he served as a soldier and administrator in Somalia. He became a District Officer in Northern Rhodesia in 1951 and served throughout the Mau Mau emergency. In the last five years he has been a white hunter in East Africa and is now a partner in a company organizing safaris. Major Collins describes himself as an incurable romantic and a confirmed bachelor.

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A TEAR FOR SOMALIA

DOUGLAS COLLINS

A Tear for Somalia

Illustrated by
BRUNO DI SOPRA

THE ADVENTURERS CLUB

LONDON

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For
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Such words as zariba, dia, dingbats, bangsticks, deshek, lag, tebed, griff, etc., occurring frequently, the quotation marks have been omitted after they have been used once.

The Shag of Somalia is equivalent to the South African word Bush-veld.

'On the Adamboi plain there is a tree
for poverty and love to shelter under.'
—from a Somali love-poem

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FOREWORD

WHEN, on the 26th of February, 1941, the capital of Italian Somaliland, Mogadishu, was taken by General Cunningham's forces advancing north from Kenya, the Italians decided to abandon the defence of Somalia and the Ogaden (taken from Abyssinia in 1935) and withdraw to Abyssinia.

This left an enormous area of country without any form of administration, a gap that had to be filled quickly if a complete breakdown was to be avoided, although initially the big northern province of the Mijjertein was administered from British Somaliland, supported by the Somaliland Camel Corps.

The distance, in a straight line, from Cape Guardafui to the Kenya border, is about eleven hundred miles, so that the immensity of the task can be imagined. In order to provide a force to maintain order, both in the towns and in the bush, the Somalia Gendarmerie was raised. Composed initially of Nyasas, Wakamba and Somalis, with a surprisingly small cadre of British officers and N.C.O.s, it steadily increased the percentage of Somalis as time went on.

The administration of the country was carried on by the Enemy Occupied Territory Administration, usually known as O.E.T.A. With a nucleus of trained administrative officers from other parts of Africa, it absorbed a number of young officers from the Somalia Gendarmerie and other units.

This story is by one of these young officers, and the reader will get a very clear picture of the problems that faced him, the harshness of the country and the toughness of its inhabitants. Not a country to which to send young men lacking in self-reliance or unable to make their own decisions.

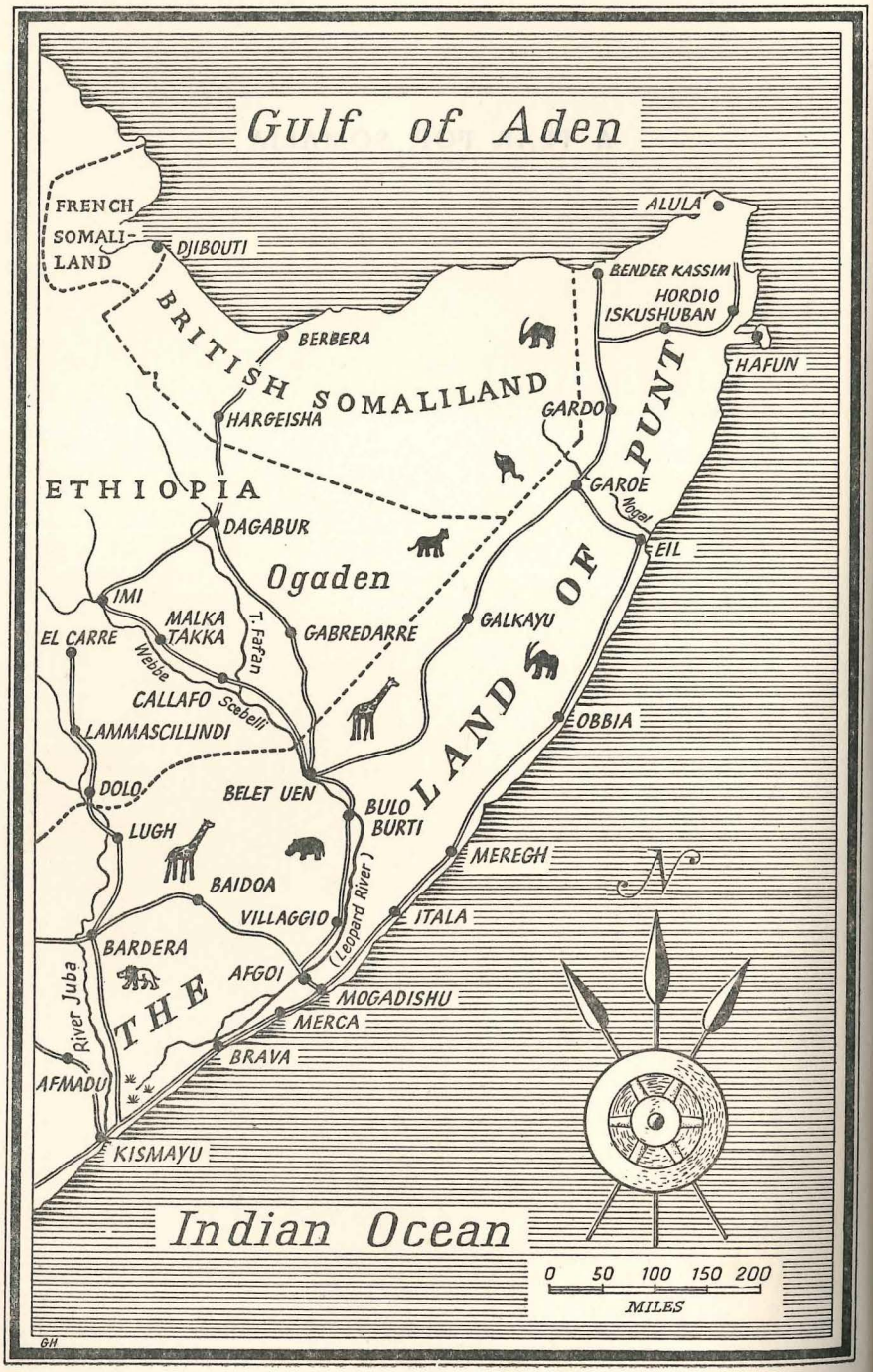
Inevitably there were some misfits and some tragedies: in war-time it is not possible to indulge in the same careful selection of individuals for every task. By and large a difficult job was carried out most creditably, and the country was handed back to the Italians, for their period of Trusteeship under the United Nations Organisation, as a going concern.

1960 sees the arrival of independence for Somalia. Let us hope that those countries who have brought her to independence will stand by to see that she survives in this difficult modern world without being made the plaything of international politics.

LIEUT-COLONEL HUMPHREY FRENCH

Late R.U.R. and some time of the Somaliland Camel Corps, Somaliland Scouts and Somalia Gendarmerie

A TEAR FOR SOMALIA



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'WHAT games do you play?' asked the major a little testily. He was now tired and badly wanted a drink.

It was 1941; in Mombasa during the hot season, and he had doubtless asked the same question of the other thirty-nine subalterns preceding me.

I was the last to be interviewed.

The major was small and wiry and the years of harsh, tropical sun had burnt his face the colour of an old, well-worn cricket ball. His khaki-drill uniform was starched and superbly cut. The Fox's puttees he wore, rolled down from below the knee, proclaimed that he had served in a cavalry regiment in the dim past.

I came to attention in my shorts-long, with buttoned turn-ups which reached to within an inch of my hose-tops, disclosing an inch of pink leg. I was just twenty-one and pink all over except for my straw-coloured hair and innocent grey-green eyes. My uniform fitted where it touched, for the Jewish tailor whom my sergeant-major at the transit camp in London had recommended to me did not believe in fripperies. Neither did the clued-up sergeant-major, who considered me just another sucker for the 'Shag' as he collected his ten bob rake-off from Uncle afterwards.

Still dreaming of Ireland, poteen and 'dingbats', the major's question brought me to attention. I blushed with pleasure and managed to stammer, 'Cricket, sir.'

'Soccerruggerdoyouride?'

'A little, sir.'

'Good,' said the major. 'Splendid. We'll send you to the Furthest Shag. You will be in your element there, my boy. "Cricketridingsoccerrugger," you'll get the lot.'

'Oh, by the way, what is your name?'

'Collins, sir.'

'H'm,' he pondered, forgetting his thirst for the moment.

'What made you volunteer for the Somalia Gendarmerie?'

'I did not volunteer. I was detailed,' I stammered.

'Detailed? Detailed? What the hell do you mean, detailed?'

'Well, sir.' This a little shamefacedly. 'I was stationed with my battalion in Ireland exactly a month ago, quite happy as a matter of fact, sir.' I chattered away cheerfully.

'The P.M.C. couldn't accommodate me in the mess and so I was billeted out in a little Irish pub. The poteen wompo was simply delicious. I could also get an occasional game of cricket and the Irish dingbats, black hair and green eyes——'

'Wompo? Dingbats? Are you mad? Get down to brass tacks and cut out the other damned nonsense,' he roared. 'What do you mean by detailed?'

'Oh.' I stiffened at attention with my pleasant thoughts of cricket, poteen and dingbats quickly fading as the irascible major barked at me.

'The adjutant called all the subalterns on parade, sir, and the colonel called for volunteers. Er, there were no volunteers and as the colonel didn't think I was particularly bright he said it might be a good thing all round if I went to Africa. Here I am, sir.'

'Good God,' spat out the major in disgust. 'Fall out.'

As I saluted, about-turned and marched out of the tent the major shouted, 'Orderly, letea whisky na soda, kubwa sana. Na haraka'. Returning to the mess tent a few yards away, a black figure clad in what looked like a nightgown with an inverted plant-pot on its head almost collided with me coming out. I side-stepped and the apparition, precariously balancing half a glass of whisky and a bottle of soda on a tray, glided into the major's tent. I surmised quite rightly that he had called for the biggest whisky and soda in history. I couldn't quite make out what 'haraka' meant but wasn't far wrong when I thought it was probably Ki-swahili for hurry.

I, too, felt in need of a very fast wompo and ordered it. Not so very long ago I'd fought in France and had seemingly swum half the English Channel to escape from German whizzbangs at Dunkirk, and had now come by troopship from Ireland to Durban. There, together with my fellow officers we had been crammed on the battleship *Bahram* and had sailed in her to Mombasa. We had been told that our draft was urgently needed up north to fight chums called Shifta and here we were on the wing to a place called the Furthest Shag where, apparently, they played 'Cricketsoccerrugger' and what have you. Not at all what one would expect, but in those fargone days I was so terribly naïve. So was Birdie, a fellow officer on the draft. Birdie was large, far from bright, and had caused havoc in Durban by getting screechers and having to be wheeled aboard the battleship by two grinning matelots in a hand-cart. The follow-

ing day he further blotted his copy-book by returning the captain's salute as that very senior officer passed the bridge. Birdie, in his ignorance of naval tradition, thought the ship's captain was saluting him and was shagged with pleasure as he recounted the story to us afterwards. Birdie could definitely be called a white steel-brain. Just about the whole draft were milling about in the mess, a large E.P.I.P. tent, and such magical words as Mogadishu, Iskushuban, Cape Guardafui, Bendir Kassim and Alula were passing from lip to lip.

'Where are you off to, Dougie?' someone asked.

'Oh,' I replied vaguely. 'I'm off to the Furthest Shag. It sounds interesting for the locals are keen cricketers evidently.'

We spent a few days in Mombasa, known as the Island of War. For Jesus, its oldest building, flying the crimson flag of the Sultan of Zanzibar, had changed little we were told since the year 1593 when the years of bloody fighting began with the fort first falling into the hands of the Arabs and then being retaken by the Portuguese.

Finally, about a hundred years later the Arabs retook the fort after massacring the entire Portuguese garrison.

After spending a few days in Mombasa we moved by train to Nairobi, where the powers that be stressed the urgent necessity of our leaving the fleshpots for a place up north called Mogadishu. Thirty-odd hopefuls were then crammed into half a dozen diesels and so began our odyssey into Somalia, which was to be our home for ten years. Home, that is, for the ones who survived, for some were killed, some killed themselves, some went mad and others died of drink.

Leaving Nairobi we passed through Thika, a rather desolate little township of sordid Indian dukas (native shops), thence along the red, sandy ribbon of road, some two hundred miles of it to a place called Garissa. Here the diesels laboriously crossed a rather imposing pontoon bridge over the River Tana. South African Engineers had thrown this up hastily several months previously to facilitate the transporting of troops, equipment and all the paraphernalia of war preparatory to chasing the fleeing Italian armies across Somalia and into Ethiopia. At Garissa we caught our first glimpse of Somalis: a smoky-eyed, hot-tempered race of nomadics of whom we had all heard so much. The Somali is inclined to be lazy, for his dignity does not allow him to do manual work. He usually employs himself in watching his flocks, and he will lie for hours under a shady thorn acacia tree, his praying-carpet and water-bottle beside him, while he drones to a kind of chant songs about his former fights and the stock he has looted. Treated with confidence and consideration he is cheerful, very

intelligent and willing to learn. Treat him harshly, however, or unjustly and he becomes sulky, mutinous and obstinate. He is an excellent scout, a wonderful walker and very courageous. He never forgets an insult or a wrong and will wait years to avenge it. He can go for days without water and when doing so eats little or nothing to avoid creating a thirst. He lives mainly on his flocks of camels, cattle, sheep and goats, occasionally eating their flesh, but mostly relying on their milk.

As a warrior, particularly in attack, he is superb, being very cunning and experienced in bush fighting. The weapons he chiefly carries are a stabbing spear and a wicked double-edged knife. In some areas he will still carry a small round shield made of giraffe hide. However, as I was to find out later, the aftermath of war had left many of them armed with .256 rifles or 'bangsticks' as we called them. With training he makes an excellent shot. In the Somali woman he has a handsome mate. Tall and graceful with exquisite figures, they walk like mannequins. In colour they vary from deep chocolate to a light bronze and with their large expressive eyes, aristocratic features and long, silky, black hair are among the most beautiful women in the world. We had all been lectured on these traits of the Somali and I mused on them as I eagerly dipped my water-bottle in the Tana. I was learning fast. Once the Tana is left behind the endless miles of burning sand offers little or nothing in the way of water until the Juba at Bardera is reached.

Our diesel convoy moved on after the formalities had been gone through with the District Commissioner at Garissa and the whole party camped in the Shag about twenty miles north of Garissa.

I was fascinated by the desert twilight and when the moon rose behind a tracery of thorn trees was quite entranced by the beauty of the scene. The burning red sand quietly faded into a soft pink, then the purple shadows took over as a lion grunted savagely into the stillness of the night. A Somali caravan, like a line of ghosts, quietly passed: the only sound they made was the shuffle of the camels' feet and the hollow, thunk, thunk, thunk of the camel bells. We slept.

The beauty of the morning was comparable to that of the night, for when the sun rose a round hill outlined in flame above the horizon the desert lived. The colourless grass ran gold, the larks spiralled up, their wings drumming in the clear sky. A thousand spiders had woven their webs in the thorn trees from branch to branch. The weaver birds were astir and several hornbills with their peculiar dipping flight went past. Dik-diks played around the camp and a bull rhinoceros crashed his way through the scrub as we broke camp.

A plate of fried soya-bean bangers washed down by a mug of coffee brought me to sand again and off moved the diesels, relentlessly. The sun, so lovely in the morning, was now scorching and tropical. Bardera was reached in the late afternoon and the convoy bivouacked again for the night.

At sunset several of us took the opportunity of visiting Lieutenant Elliott's grave near the banks of the Juba River and over a drink that evening heard how the young officer had met his lonely death at the hands of the Aulihan, a powerful Somali tribe of the Bardera District.

'Aiee,' said the old Somali interpreter. 'Iss ka eg!' (Harken.)

'It was on the 2nd February, 1916, and the day before the Serenle Aulihan, some three hundred strong, raided the Marehan and seized eight hundred of their camels, killing eight Marehan warriors.'

He meditated, and continued. 'Ilahow! (O God), I remember so well. When you young sahibs get to know our country and people you will learn that these two tribes are the most savage and their battles the fiercest. No mercy is shown or asked and the victors always mutilate the prisoners, who fall to their knives.' He paused again, slowly counting off the beads on his rosary as he unfolded his story to his attentive listeners.

'When the Elliott Sahib heard the news of the raid he left his camp at Serenle early and reached a water-hole called Hagaghabli when the sun was so high.' He pointed to the galaxy of stars above us. 'The sahib sent for the headman of the Aulihan as the raided camels were close at hand. He also sent for Abdurrahman Mursal and told him that if the looted camels were not returned straight away he would be sent to Kismayu and imprisoned. Abdurrahman, you must know, at that time was Chief of the Aulihan and thought himself all-powerful in Jubaland. The sahib gave Aburrahman three days in which to return the looted camels and to pay an additional fine of eight hundred camels as "dia", or blood money for the eight Marehan killed. You will also know that the life of a man in the Somalilands is worth one hundred camels and that of a woman fifty. Abdurrahman said that he would consult his headmen and after telling them of the sahib's instructions complained bitterly that he favoured the Marehan as opposed to their own tribe, the Aulihan. He then put forward a plan to attack Serenle station and swore all his headmen on the Koran to keep faith with him. Meanwhile, the sahib, angry at being kept waiting so long, returned to Serenle.

'About two days later, Ali Mohamed, a Herti trader who was about to marry Abdurrahman's daughter, came to the Elliott Sahib and told him that Abdurrahman had warned him to tell the Herti askaris to leave the

station the next night as the Aulihan would attack and did not wish to kill Herti. The sahib thought the whole matter "fitina" and then Ali Mohamed came here to Bardera and told his story again to the Italian Residente (Commissioner), for at that time Bardera was under the Italians whilst Serenle was on the Inglesi side of the border. The Italian Residente sent a note to the Elliott Sahib, warning him.

'The day of the attack the Elliott Sahib's company-sergeant-major' (here the interpreter smiled reminiscently) 'informed him that Abdurrahman had sent in a black bullock, a black goat and a black sheep for meat. The sahib told him to have the bullock and goat killed for the men and to send the sheep to his kitchen. The sergeant-major said that the present of three black animals meant bad trouble, signifying in Somali custom, hostility. The askaris had refused to touch the meat. He also said that they should prepare for an attack, at any rate letting the men keep their rifles with them during the night instead of placing them in the guard-room at night. The Elliott Sahib was brave but foolish. He picked up an egg, dropping it on the ground with the words, "A Somali shauri (affair) breaks up like that. They will not dare do anything."

'The second day Abdurrahman collected five hundred warriors of the Aulihan sections Rer Ali, Rer Afwa, Tur Addi, Rer Afgab, and Wafatta, telling them he was going to raid the Marehan again. The war party camped that night at Helishid. The sahib heard of the gathering of a large war party but thought, as they gave out, that it was a raid on the Marehan in preparation.

'That night at about 11 p.m. Abdurrahman left Helishid and marched close to Serenle which he reached at about one in the morning, when he told his men that he was leading them to attack the station to show that he was no slave to the Government. Three hundred men were to attack the boma, fifty men to surround the sahib's house and fifty men to loot the bazaar. The war party of fifty approached the sahib's house and were challenged three times by the sentry who suspected them. They answered "Friend" twice and the third time not at all, on which the sentry fired and turned out the guard. The Aulihan put in many shots which killed all the guard. Then the sahib, taking a lamp in one hand and a pistol in the other came to the window and looked out. He too was killed.

'That is how the Elliott Sahib died, shot not once but many times, then stabbed and slashed.'

Dusk had now fallen. The Somali, his story told, his swarthy, ravaged face a dark blur in his head-dress, relapsed into Somali, 'Bismillihi, Wan shegaya, meshas bu ku Dinte' (By God, I am telling, he died at that place).

The plaintive notes of Lights Out sounded from Bardera. The Somali rose to his feet, salaamed, and with a 'Nabad Gelyo' (Good-bye) stalked off into the night.

'What a splendid-looking old man,' someone remarked.

'Yes,' agreed the District Commissioner who had been invited in camp for a drink. 'His name is Mohamed Egal, a Marehan, and now my interpreter. He was Elliott's C.S.M. when he was killed. He managed to escape with a machine-gun and himself killed some half-dozen Aulihan during the raid.'

'Well, strike a light,' said Birdie the next morning, heaving himself out of his camp-bed. 'Look at those fargone donkeys.' I blinked and saw twenty donkeys threading their way through camp in single file, herded by three Somali 'yeros' (small children). Each donkey had a little sack tied under its backside.

'My own pet idea,' said the District Commissioner who had come to see us off. 'Collects the manure more effectively than sweeping it up afterwards. More hygienic and damned good for my tomatoes. Cheerio, chaps.'

2

MOGADISHU, the capital of Somalia, is a hot, odiferous, colourful city built on the shores of the Indian Ocean. It was founded in the ninth century and before the Italians came was the seat of the Sultans of Zanzibar. The residential town is of unique beauty with the old Sultans' palaces, imposing mosques with attractive minarets and beautiful Italian-built cathedral. It boasts several hotels, of which the most palatial is the 'Croce-del-Sud' and the most sordid the 'Smash and Grab'. There is no harbour. Personnel and baggage are lowered off ships standing out at sea by slings and baskets into lighters which transport them to the jetty.

The town, however, is chiefly famed for its brothels, prickly-heat, mogrot, Cioffi gin at four shilings a bottle and 'Old and Bold' brandy at six shillings, and, of course, the 'BBBWWNNOM'. To the uninitiated this stands for 'Big-bottomed Bastards who were never north of Mogadishu'. There were hundreds of them. They all suffered from prickly-heat and mogrot. Here they stayed for years, all glued to chairs in decaying, palatial offices. During the 'Kherif', or hot season, the humidity brings on prickly-heat and this, with constant chair-bashing, develops into mogrot.

Every Saturday midday these tarmac-bound officers instructed their luscious Italian secretaries to hide away their files of bumph, when they rushed madly for 'wompo' (any kind of drink) from their headquarters, known as the 'Mad House', to the Officer's Club some three hundred yards away. Some of the weaker ones were elbowed out of the way and often injured. After about three hours' solid wompo-bashing they called for their staff cars and headed by the brigadier, who lived at Cockroach Castle, they were whisked away to their various houses and flats on the sea-front where they ate.

At 5 p.m. they surfaced again, then began another exodus, this time to the beaches where they lay about like fat seals on the sand, sleeping, or lazily watching the Italian dingbats promenading past in their scanty, provocative bathing costumes. Life was tough in Mogadishu.

The day after our arrival we received instructions at the Somalia Gendarmerie mess, known as the 'Gloom-box', to report *en masse* to the

Questura at 0900 hours. The Questura was the old Italian Criminal Investigation building which had recently been taken over by the Gendarmerie as headquarters.

It was in the middle of the brothel area, for the Italians knew a thing or two about obtaining 'griff' (information). They had it right in their own backyard, as it were. Straight from the camel's mouth. Any fracas, any knifings, any murders, all they had to do was to rake in the local whores and get the griff. They knew everything. And when I say everything, I mean everything.

'Good morning, gentlemen,' greeted the colonel.

'You may sit. My name is Patrick. I am Colonel-Commandant of the Somalia Gendarmerie to which you are all seconded.'

He looked like a character out of *Beau Geste*. A brick-red face, iron-grey hair and bristling moustaches. Well over six foot, he had four rows of gongs, the ones that mattered had obviously been earned the hard way. He was most impressive.

'I will now try and put you all in the picture. Here we all come under Middle East Command, that is, the country we are to police and administer, Somalia, or ex-Italian Somaliland. Also the Ogaden and the Reserved Areas of Ethiopia, which have all been placed under British military administration since a few months ago when we defeated the Italian armies in the field. To the north of us is British Somaliland, which will eventually revert to British Colonial Office control, and further north still, the smaller territory of French Somaliland. To the south we have the Northern Frontier District of Kenya and these territories form the geographical feature known as the Horn of Africa, or, as the ancient Egyptians called it, "The Land of Punt".

'This is a vast area consisting mostly of semi-desert scrub country which is inhabited by Somalis who are Muslims and follow the nomadic way of life common to the inhabitants of deserts the world over. Fifty years ago Winston Churchill once called this country a desert of rocks and thorn trees and peopled by rifle-armed fanatics. It has altered little since then. The perennial need of the tribes for good grazing for their vast camel herds, sheep and goats has led to the development of a complicated but well-defined series of tribal migrations. For example, tribes from British Somaliland move south into the Ogaden Haud during the rainy season and tribes from the hinterland of Somalia move towards the fertile valleys of the Uebe Scebelli River and the Juba when their own lands become parched. This almost constant flow of tribal migrations naturally causes bloody clashes between the rival groups in search of grazing and water.

These tribal fights have been going on for centuries and now that the whole of the Italian administration has disappeared and collapsed matters have worsened.

'The wet-weather grazing grounds of the British Somaliland tribes lie in Ethiopian territory and under a treaty made in 1897 with the Emperor Menelik II the rights of the British-protected tribes were secured, but it was not until 1935 that an Anglo-French-Ethiopian Commission was able to demarcate on the ground the limits of the grazing area. Shortly after agreement had been reached the Italo-Ethiopian war broke out and no further settlement was possible until now, when the conclusion of hostilities in East Africa has left British troops in occupation of the whole area. Two areas, the Ogaden Province and the so-called Reserved Areas which together contained the grazing area claimed by the British Somaliland tribes, were retained, although the sovereignty of Ethiopia has been recognised by H.M. Government. Meanwhile, the Somalia Gendarmerie has the unenviable task of maintaining law and order and of administering these territories until such time as a final settlement is reached.

'To touch upon the Ogaden Province. Bounded on the north by British Somaliland, to the east and south-east by Somalia and to the south by Kenya's northern frontier, this Ethiopian province is approximately the same size as the British Isles. Geographically and ethnically it is a Somali country. Of the population of some 320,000 all but a few thousand are nomadic tribesmen solely dependent on livestock for their existence. It is quite remarkable how little the close contact between the Ogaden and Ethiopia has affected the people of the Ogaden. They retain all the characteristics and customs of the Somali and adhere to the Mohammedan faith. The Ethiopians have not bothered the tribesmen about government or law and order, but they do sweep down in their large raiding parties to exact tribute in the shape of livestock, and in doing so cause hardship and casualties. Those of you who are stationed up there will find enough fighting to satisfy your needs and tribal fighting is no picnic, I assure you.' He lit a cigarette.

'I am sorry, you may smoke if you wish.'

He continued.

'Most of you will be leaving Mogadishu immediately. Get into the bush, which I have just described to you, there's some 300,000 square miles of it. Plenty of scope.

'Get to know your tribes, there's some 1,250,000 of them. Respect their religion. Learn their language; it's not written so use your imagination. Seventy per cent of the population are nomads so you won't get the griff

sitting on your backsides. We've no tents. Live under thorn trees as they do. Chase them up. They have some 1,000 rifles, several thousand hand-grenades and a few automatic weapons, mostly booty from the Italians. We want them recovered.

'There is trouble here, here, here and there,' he continued, stabbing a large map on the wall violently with his cane.

'The Aulihan are fighting the Marehan, the Garre are fighting the Galgail, the Uadan are fighting the Geledi, the Omar Mohamed are fighting the Habr Ghidir Saad and the Shifta are fighting for the hell of it.

'Stop it. We're here to bring back law and order.

'Get the griff at your stations and you will soon bring the various situations you have to deal with under control. The Somali doesn't give a damn for our flag, or any flag for that matter. Make him.

'It's up to each and every one of you. Shoot better than he can. Ride better. On your safaris walk him off his feet. Endure the hardships he does. You will then have his loyalty.

'I emphasise again, you must first get his loyalty.'

His cold blue eyes flickered over us.

'Most of you chaps will be completely on your own with at most a platoon of askaris. You will be hundreds of miles from your neighbour. You will have no wireless sets and little or no transport for some time to come. You will know loneliness, for the desert is lonely. I will endeavour to relieve those of you from the more isolated stations as and when I can. God alone knows though where your reliefs will come from. Where you will have a platoon of askaris the Italians had a couple of companies. They had the men to spare—we haven't.

'Any questions?

'No? Good. Report to Major Ponsonby, my adjutant next door, for your postings.

'Glad to have met you all. Good luck, gentlemen. You'll need it.'

'Your name?' asked Ponsonby, the adjutant.

'Collins, Douglas Collins, sir.'

'Glad to meet you. Do sit down. You're lucky you're off to Afgoi. Only twenty-eight kilometres from here on a tarmac road. Like London to Brighton. Unfortunately all our trained askaris are allocated to the Furthest Shag—places like the Ogaden and the Mijjertein; but never mind, I've a bright idea. Do you speak Amharic?

'No, obviously you don't,' he answered the question himself, glancing at me. I was looking particularly dim, being full of Old and Bold brandy topped up by Cioffii gin from the previous evening's party. After a

session on Cioffi gin one shouldn't really want another drink for at least a week. The fumes keep you going.

'Report to the jail and collect thirty Abyssinians.'

'I do beg your pardon, sir?'

'You heard what I said. Report to the jail for thirty Abyssinians. They're mostly political prisoners, ex-Shifta and murderers. The Italians have had 'em in clink since the year dot. They're a bit wild but should make good material. Here's a chit. Get yourself a diesel from Transport. No. On second thoughts you'd better walk it—we're short of transport. When you get to Afgoi, report to the District Commissioner there. He's an Australian. A Kenya farmer. Fellow called Sidney. A good chap. The Somalis call him "Indo Adde" (White-eyes). Cheerio.

'Well, what are you waiting for? Bash on.'

I bashed.

A little dazed I reported to Mogadishu Jail and collected the most villainous crowd of cut-throats I'd ever seen. Fuzzy-wuzzies from the Danakil country. Ill-avisaged, pock-marked toughs from the Arussi country and Amharas from Addis Ababa. They looked a shower. Poor devils though, I thought, they've had a hard time of it, but given good rations and a uniform, they'll soon get back their self-respect.

Stringing together the few words I knew of Italian, Somali and Swahili I got them into some semblance of order and marched, or rather shuffled them to Forte Cecci, the Gendarmerie depot. Here the quartermaster issued them with a .256 Italian carbine or bangstick, bayonet, uniform, water-bottle and blanket, after obtaining their thumb-printed receipts on an impressive-looking piece of bumph.

'Ye'll draw yourrr ammunetion frrom the Deestrict Commissioner at Afgoi, laddie,' said the quartermaster, a Scot, who had an imposing array of medal ribbons from the 1914-18 war, including the Military Medal and Bar.

'Eef I were you I'd firrst instal a wee bit of disceepline into yon shower of black-enamelled biscuits ye call askaries before issuing them with their ammunetion.'

How right you are, I thought.

'Och, by the way,' continued the quartermaster, 'here is your sergeant-major, Abdurrahman. Look after him, he's a wee jewel.' The 'wee jewel' was about 6 feet 2 inches and towered above me.

'Jambo,' I said, shaking his hand.

'Jambo sana, effendi,' replied that worthy, whipping me off a faultless salute.

'Habari gani?'

'The habari's splendid,' I replied, relapsing into English, for I'd come to the end of my Swahili.

'We're now bashing on to Afgoi.'

'Mzuri sana,' he beamed.

'Fallin. Lefti-righti-lefti.'

I swung to the head of my fargone platoon with Abdurrahman bringing up the rear. Along the metalled road to Afgoi, whistling happily, 'We're off to see the wizard, the wonderful wizard of Oz'.

3

We were now approaching Afgoi and it had taken us just over four hours to get there, marching past the plodding caravans of camels and donkeys carrying their bundles of straw and fodder. I was no longer whistling 'We're off to see the wizard', but had changed my tune to 'Carry me back to Old Virginia' on account I suppose of the fields of cotton bordering both sides of the road near Afgoi. It was a mournful, nostalgic tune and it suited my mood. I had tried to follow the colonel's advice in walking my men off their feet but as far as I could see they had just about walked me off mine. I was shagged.

'Fix bayonets and march to attention, sergeant-major,' I called down the line, wiping the sweat out of my eyes. Might as well create a bit of a show, I thought, for the District Commissioner's benefit.

We now swung into the village, watched curiously, and a little apprehensively, by scattered groups of Somalis. Halting the platoon outside the D.C.'s office I went in to report. A uniformed Illalo, a tribal policeman, on guard at the office presented arms which restored my flagging morale. Indo Adde was not in his office and the Corporal of the Guard, a tall, handsome Somali, gestured that he would take me to his house. We walked down a well-kept drive bordered by massed colours of flamboyants and frangipane, when suddenly I saw a European standing under a waving coco-nut palm. Near by was a palatial house half-hidden in a cluster of palm trees.

What I failed to see was a half-clad Somali riverine perched precariously on top of the swaying palm under which I was standing. He was cutting down the fruit with a large chopping knife.

Marching briskly forward I halted, saluted, and at that moment a large nut dropped on my topee. I staggered.

Indo Adde, for it was he, helped me to my feet and casually remarked, 'Heard you were coming. Glad to meet you. Collins, isn't it? Hope you're not a casualty already?'

'Don't think so, sir,' I replied, endeavouring to shake hands and at the same time trying to remove the topee which had jammed over my ears.

'Have you ever tried coco-nut juice and gin? Here, let's sit down.' He waved to a fallen palm log on which I sat gratefully.

'Hussein, letea chupa ya gin na bilhauri wawili.'

The bottle of gin and two glasses were produced as if by magic. Just like Aladdin and his lamp, I thought admiringly.

'Now,' said Indo Adde, picking up the nut which had fallen on me. 'Watch.'

A few deft strokes of the knife and the green outside fibre was sliced away exposing the soft white nut inside full of juice.

'Should be iced though. Try it. Cheers.'

'Ting-a-ling, sir.'

It was delicious.

'Oh, by the way, sir, my platoon is by your office and I should see about billeting them.'

'Move 'em into the old Italian Dubas lines which are empty. Finish off that wompo and I'll show you over the place, it will be dark in an hour.'

We walked back to the office and after my men had been settled in and fed we returned, walking near the bank alongside the river. Dusk had fallen; emerald-green doves fluttered and cooed in the palm-fronds above us.

'The Uebe Scebelli is a pretty river, don't you think?' Indo Adde remarked, breaking into my thoughts.

'Uebe means river in Somali and Scebel means leopard—Uebe Scebelli, the Leopard River. It doesn't quite make it to the sea but peters out at a place down south called Villaggio.

'Ah, here we are. Come on in and make yourself at home. Would you like a bath first or a wompo? Stay the night with me and then you'll have time to sort yourself out tomorrow. There's a little cottage I've made available for you by the river.'

'It's kind of you, sir.' I was grateful. 'I had visions of living under a thorn tree with hyenas nibbling at my toes.'

'You'll get all that and more when you move off up-country, but here, so near Mogadishu, we're practically civilised,' he laughed.

After a drink I had my bath, then relaxing in a chair found time to study my host.

He was about thirty-three, I judged. Of medium height and well built. He had reddish hair, a strong face full of character, a good square chin and a twinkle in his penetrating light-blue eyes. He grew a moustache which failed to hide a humorous mouth. He had a wonderful personality. Liking what I saw I thought we would get on well together.

'Smoke?' he pushed over a packet of Players cigarettes which I declined.

'H'm, I don't smoke either. We've one virtue apiece anyway. We won't talk shop tonight. Come into the office tomorrow morning and I'll then put you in the picture and give you all the griff. This is a fairly peaceful station compared to some, and apart from the Garre and the Galgail, two of our local tribes who periodically kill each other off and rape each other's women, there's little doing. It's just like a game of soccer with them. They've been doing it for centuries and neither you nor I will stop it. The Khadi, a Somali judge, normally deals with any minor affrays and I only take a hand when the fighting gets out of control and they kill on a big scale.'

'What do you mean by a big scale, sir?' I was curious.

'Oh, well, a few months ago the Galgail, who are numerically superior to the Garre, raided deep into Garre country and killed eleven of them. Not so good as they speared a boy and a woman. I fined them five hundred camels for that lot as well as making them pay the customary dia or blood money for the dead and wounded. A man's life, as you probably know, is worth one hundred camels and that of a woman fifty. The loss of a limb, ten to fifteen camels, and so on, to a few camels paid over for minor wounds. These details are all settled by the Khadi and tribal elders from each tribe. If they agree on the dia to be paid over, so well and good. If they don't, then I arbitrate. It's always best to let them deal with these tribal affrays according to their own Mohammedan law and customs. I only take a hand if and when they reach complete deadlock.

'Here, I'm sorry. I said no shop tonight. You look tired. Shall we have dinner? Oh, and don't call me sir, my name is Ray.'

After a very adequate dinner of soup, roast lamb chops with mint sauce, followed by some sort of a soufflé, we sat down to coffee.

'Well, I hope you've had enough to eat. I'm going to turn in. Breakfast at 8.30. Your room is through that door there, you'll find everything you want.'

'Good night.'

'Good night,' I replied. 'Thank you for everything, sir.'

Morning tea came in at 7 a.m.

As I rubbed the sleep out of my eyes, a small, sad-eyed Somali, clad in the usual white nightgown-like garment, which I'd since learned was called a 'khanzu', quietly laid down the tray on a small bedside table and said, 'Nabat, sahib'.

'Nabat, jambo, good morning.' I returned his greeting in Somali, Swahili and English as he drew the curtains and noiselessly left the room.

Helping myself to sugar I sipped the tea appreciatively as the sun's first rays streamed into the room. Quickly finishing my tea I had a bath, shaved, then putting on socks, boots and puttees I wriggled out of my 'lungi', a coloured piece of cloth something like a sarong, and put on a clean pair of shorts. My khaki-drill tunic had been freshly ironed and the buttons and insignia polished. Putting on my topee and tucking a swagger-cane under my arm I went to find my platoon. I was pleasantly surprised. In an open space near the improvised barracks, which consisted of a dozen round thatched mud huts, Abdurrahman had the platoon squatting round him in a large circle.

'Jambo, effendi,' he smiled, saluting smartly.

'Weapon training. Lessoni one.'

Returning his salute and salutations somewhat guiltily, for I'd quite forgotten to give him instructions the preceding night, I said, rather lamely, 'Er, do carry on, sergeant-major.'

I had better have a word with the chaps, who had all stood up at my approach, I thought.

'Jambo, watu wote,' and then in English, just to make sure, 'Good morning, all of you.'

I was quite bewildered at their response.

A chorus of 'Bon giorno's, Signor Tenente', came from half of them who bowed from the waist, taking off their hats as they did so.

A few gave a sort of naval salute, holding their rifles in their left hands. Two rushed forward to shake my hand. One kissed my boots and one remained seated, I noticed. He had obviously been in clink for years and didn't give a damn. Only one sloped arms and slapped the butt of his rifle in the approved manner.

Ahah, I thought. Splendid fellow. Must make him a lance-corporal.

Sergeant-Major Abburrahman exploded. A stream of Somali invective came from his lips. He gestured and pantomimed for about five minutes in front of the men, then grabbing a rifle from the askari still sitting he kicked him to his feet, sloped arms, marched up to me, stood to attention, fairly smacked the butt of the rifle and shouted, 'Jambo, effendi'.

'Namni hii,' he shouted. 'Like this.'

A quiet voice behind me spoke up.

'He says, sahib, they like a lot of bloody pregnant camels. He say their fathers were eight-legged warabas (hyenas) and many more bad words.

'I District Commissioner's interpreter. I Omar Jama, sahib,' continued that worthy, shaking me by the hand.

'The D.C. Sahib would like speak you in Offis.'

I followed him, leaving the irate Abdurrahman to carry on.

'Hello, Dougie. Come on in and sit down. I've most of the chiefs here and thought this would be a good opportunity for you to meet them.' Indo Adde gestured to some dozen, mostly elderly-looking Somalis in the office.

'Meet Abdi Omar, Chief of the Garre, and his headman, Ali Hersi. Chief Omar Ali of the Bimal.' The introductions continued until I had shaken hands and had, apparently, been introduced to all present.

'Take a good look at that sulky-looking biscuit standing on his own. He is Haji Mohamed Elmi, Chief of the Galgail. He's just paid over several hundred camels in blood money to the Garre and he's feeling very sorry for himself.'

Haji Mohamed acknowledged my friendly smile with a curt nod and a defiant look of disdain from his hot, smouldering eyes.

'Right, Omar. Tell the chiefs they can go now,' the D.C. said briskly. 'Also tell them to think well on my words. I want no more trouble from the Galgail or the Garre for that matter and if there are any more killings I will now send the Collins Sahib with his askaris to arrest the offenders and to confiscate their stock.'

What a hope, I thought. He hasn't seen the shagbags yet. I had, however, underrated his amazing grasp on matters affecting his district, for he suddenly asked, 'Your platoon. Where on earth did Mogadishu dig them up from? They look like a lot of jail-birds to me—Ethiopians aren't they?'

'Yes, sir, as a matter of fact they are, and they do come from clink,' I answered.

'Mark you,' the D.C. said, 'I've nothing against Ethiopians, they're damned good fighters, but there's bound to be trouble. I just cannot understand Mogadishu sending them here. Don't they realise that Abyssinians, being Coptic Christians, and Somalis being Mohammedans, just won't mix? They loathe each other. Added to this is the fact that your platoon of hopefuls have been in jail for God knows how long. All of them must be as wild as hell. They had to be released, of course, we both realise that, but they should have been repatriated to their own country.

'How do you speak to them, by the way?'

'I don't, sir,' I replied miserably.

'H'm, we must fix that. Omar. Except on Court work you may help out the Collins Sahib as interpreter. Understand? That doesn't mean you can bugger off to the village and drink tea every five minutes. Ufahamu?'

'Yaas, sahib, I understand well,' replied Omar.

'Well, that's fixed. Now what's the time? Good, we've got half an hour before breakfast. Now let me show you the district and tribal boundaries on the map here and the various tribes you will be dealing with—most of the chiefs you've just met. It's now the 'Haggai', or dry season, and whilst the riverines—the tribes along the Uebe Scebelli who are mostly agriculturists—have no water problems of course, the Garre and the Galgail have. They are supposed to keep strictly to their own grazing areas and water-holes, but in another month there'll be little grazing and few water-holes left. That is when we get trouble. Not enough water for one tribe and so they encroach on the pastures of their neighbours, and vice versa. Get it? Half the tribal fights in this country are caused over water, or rather the lack of it. Water here is more precious than gold. It's life itself. When you have a minute to spare, swot up the various emergency regulations and proclamations. Ah, here's the Khadi, Sheikh Abdalla.

'Nabat, Khadi.'

I shook hands with a tall, imposing, well-dressed Somali who entered the office. He wore the traditional green turban denoting that he was a Haji and had been to Mecca. Over his flowing white robes he wore a brocaded waistcoat of red and yellow. He had a rosary round his neck consisting of ninety-nine amber beads, divided into sets of thirty-three each by a piece of red coral. He looked wise and the years of dealing with lies, intrigue and litigation had left their mark on his lined, patient face.

'Haji Sheikh Abdalla deals with all minor tribal problems, marriages, divorce cases and the like. They all go to the Khadi's Court. Omar the interpreter will advise you when in doubt, but don't put too much faith in him. All interpreters are rogues. Fit?' he continued, glancing at his watch. 'Almost time for breakfast. You can have a look at your cottage on the way to my place.'

We walked out of the office and made our way to a little stone bungalow overlooking the river.

'This is it. Let's pop in to see if they've cleaned the place up for you.'

I liked the look of my future home. It had a wide, spacious veranda which was partly covered by bougainvillea. It had two bedrooms with a large single dining-room in the centre. There was indoor sanitation with a shower. The whole place was protected by mosquito netting.

'The Italians did themselves well. Like it?' he asked. 'Have you got a boy yet? No? I'll send round a local for you this afternoon. He worked for me for a few months before I managed to wangle my old cook up from Kenya. He'll do you well, he's good on clothes and is a reasonable cook. He's clean, anyway. There's not much furniture in the place but the

"Piddledee" in Mogadishu might be able to help there. Come on, let's eat. You see that cottage hidden away through the trees?' he continued, pointing to a tucked-away house overlooking a bend of the river. 'It's known as the "Fornicutorium". When you see a bloody great staff car roll up the drive flying the Union Jack, you'll know the brigadier has arrived with his dingbat. They come here most week-ends.'

'What sort of a dingbat?' I queried rather stupidly.

'Oh, an Italian dingbat—really lush.'

'But I understood we were not allowed to fraternise with the Italians,' I ventured to say.

'True,' he smiled. 'Bad show, what?'

How typically British and how very naïve this youngster is, he thought, but then he'll learn. He'll soon get the griff.

'One important point I'd forgotten,' he mentioned as the table was being laid for breakfast. 'I think it might be advisable to put the village out of bounds to your platoon for the next few days. Just to give the locals time to get used to the Ethiopians. Righto?'

'Thank you for breakfast, sir,' I said, rising after the meal, 'and now if you'll excuse me I'll inform the askaris about Afgoi being out of bounds to them and then work out a training programme.'

'Come round for drinks tonight. I've got old Fellows-Smith of the Piddledee staying with me for a few days. He's really bent and has got the lot, prickly-heat, mogrot, the shakes and the rats. Dashed if I know how he hangs on to his job of Divisional Engineer but it's rumoured that he went to school with the brigadier and that could account for it. He can't last long though, the way he hits the wompo. See you tonight, Dougie.'

The platoon under Abdurrahman were drilling.

'Close order, march,' he roared. 'Open order, march.'

He certainly wouldn't disgrace the Guards, I thought.

'At ease, sergeant-major. Any shauries? Everything under control?'

'Yaas, effendi.' Abdurrahman rolled his eyes.

'The men have a shauri—kubwa sana.'

'Good, we'll fix it. Omar. Come over here, there's a good chap.' Omar looked up resignedly. He was seated just off the parade ground, under the shade of a 'Jirin' tree, a low thorny acacia. He was playing what looked like a game of chess with turds of round, dried camel dung for chessmen. His opponent, a scruffy-looking riverine, picked up a piece of dung and made what I thought was a smooth move as Omar lethargically scrambled to his feet and came over.

'Now, Omar, choose a spokesman,' I said crisply. 'What is that chap's name—he seems to have something on his chest? What? Safi Limasso? Right, Safi. What's the griff?'

Safi passionately beat his breast, then clasped his hands together as if in supplication. A stream of Amharic flowed from him.

'Come, come, Omar. What does he want?' I queried impatiently.

'Bints,' replied Omar simply.

'Bints? Good God. You mean women?'

'Yaas, sahib. Womens. That mans Safi Limasso say you his father and his mother for did you not get him out of clinki? Did you not get them all out of clinki? He say that he not have womans for eight years and he now wants you to get him one. I think he bloody liar, but p'raps not. No womens in clinki.' With this profound remark Omar folded his arms on his chest, and throwing the ball into my court awaited my reply. They didn't tell me the answer to this one at the Officer Cadet Training Unit, I thought bitterly. What a death. It seems as if I've to run a flippin' whore-shop now. This really is the dreaded end and as Indo Adde has forbidden them to enter the village anyway, I'm foxed.

Ah, I have the answer, I thought, brightly.

No money. They haven't been paid yet. No money. No crumpet. Simple.

'Tell the askaris, Omar,' I said a little pompously, 'that I sympathise with them, but I am in the same dhow myself for I have no woman. However, they'll all be paid at the end of the month and then they may go to the village and, er, er, have a woman. In the meantime, tell them, and tell them carefully, that they are not allowed in Afgoi village for the present. They are my orders and they also come from the District Commissioner Sahib. Good? All happy? Any more griff?'

'Yaas, sahib,' said Omar. 'These mens full of griff. They want know if you've been in clinki without womens?'

'Certainly not,' I snapped. 'And I've never——'

No, that would hardly be true, I thought.

'No, tell them certainly not and I don't want any more insolence from them either,' I finished rather weakly.

'Sergeant-Major Abdurrahman. A little more drill if you please.' I walked away, unsure of myself.

'Omar.' I called him up to me. 'Collect your scruffy-looking chum sitting with the chessmen or whatever game it is and come and give me a hand with my kit. The lorry from Mogadishu has just arrived.'

'You no got cuttens, sahib?' asked Omar when my few boxes and cases

had been opened. Their contents looked pitifully inadequate in the house.

'Cuttens? Oh, curtains. No, not yet, Omar, you will have to show me where I can get cloth in the village.'

'Can do,' said that worthy happily, thinking of all the devious ways he could make baksheesh out of me.

'You got memsahib?'

'No, no memsahib. I'm single, Omar. Not married.'

He looked at me pityingly.

'Every sahib should have womens. Why, the Brigadier Sahib, even Indo Adde, the District Commissioner Sahib, have——'

'That will do, Omar,' I said firmly, propelling him to the door. 'Here's a couple of shillings for yourself and your chum. Go and buy tea.'

'Ashante, sahib,' he beamed.

Sitting down on my one camp-chair I started to work out a weekly training programme for my platoon.

Indo Adde and his guest were sitting on the veranda steps having a sundowner when I arrived later.

'Fellows,' said Indo Adde. 'You haven't met my new Gendarmerie Officer, Douglas Collins, have you? Dougie, Captain Fellows-Smith.' We shook hands after a couple of abortive attempts, for the captain had the shakes already. His sundowner must have started at breakfast-time.

He was about fifty-five years old and looked it. His pale-blue, watery eyes were slightly protruding. The whites were criss-crossed with a network of pink veins. He had a pronounced twitch on the left side of his face so that I got the impression I was continually being winked at. I tried not to notice it. Fellows-Smith was in shorts and one of his stockings had fallen, crumpled to his ankle. An undone suspender showed itself forlornly. He was far gone.

'Help yourself to a wompo, Dougie,' said Indo Adde with his usual hospitality. 'There's iced beer in the 'frig.'

'Thanks, Ray, I will. A little whisky,' said Fellows-Smith, enthusiastically splashing a good three fingers of whisky into his glass and then carefully, so carefully, topping it up with about half as much water. I helped myself to a beer.

'Do you know, Colling, I don't think I like you,' said Fellows-Smith. 'You look like a large pink rat.'

'Do you see many of them?' I asked brightly.

'Not here at Afgoi,' he said seriously. 'You're the first, but Mogadishu, now. That's the place for rats. I drove here like hell, but they followed me

half-way to Afgoi then I lost them until I met you. Most upsetting. Do you drink, by the way?'

'Yes, occasionally.'

'I love wompo. Ray, let's talk about wompo for a change. I'm tired of women. I'm tired of everything except wompo. I want to talk about it.' Indo Adde did not seem enthusiastic.

'Righto,' I said, trying to humour him. 'What is your favourite wompo and how much do you drink in any one day?'

'Splendid,' he said, 'splendid. Now we're on the wing. You're not such a bad chap after all. Well, with breakfast, if I eat, that is, I like a couple of beers. Must be iced though.

'Then, whether I eat or not, I like a couple of brandies to settle the old tum. I prefer Martell, but Old and Bold will do at a pinch.' He looked at me hopefully. 'I can then usually manage until about eleven when I like another couple of beers. With lunch I like a bottle of gin, preferably Gordons, but Cioffi will do.'

I was now becoming a little sceptical of his astronomical wompo intake and am afraid became a little sarcastic, for I said, 'I suppose with dinner you drink about a bottle of whisky.' At this he became quite indignant and agitated.

'A bbbbbbbottle,' he stuttered, reaching hurriedly for his glass, with a shaking hand. 'Good God, man. Why, I ssspill more than that. Well, I think I'll turn in. I've had a hard day. Thanks for dinner, Ray.'

He picked up the bottle of whisky and put it down again, picked up his glass and emptied it. He picked up the bottle again and walked into the house. He staggered slightly. I looked at my watch. It was just on seven.

'Poor old Fellows,' said Indo Adde. 'He's in a hell of a state, you just can't keep him off the wompo. I pulled him out of Patzimas's Bar a couple of hours ago. He was pretty bent then. He must have started in Mogadishu quite early.'

'Well, I don't envy you having him on your hands,' I said sympathetically. 'Shall I go and see if he's all right?'

'No, don't worry. His boy knows the drill. He'll look after him. Sorry to bring up shop but did you remember to tell your blokes that Afgoi village is out of bounds to them?'

'Yes,' I smiled. 'I held a baraza with them and do you know what they wanted?'

'Women or drink or both,' he replied. 'The two essentials in life. There's one good thing, anyway. Your platoon's arrival will please old Padre Cheshire.' I was curious.

'Who is Padre Cheshire?'

'Padre Cheshire,' he paused reflectively, 'is a man closer to God than anyone I have ever known. He is both saint and scholar. The old boy is well over seventy and has been in these parts, all the Somalilands for that matter—Aden, Lamu, Kenya and Tanganyika—for the past thirty years.

'He is known and respected throughout East Africa by Christians, Mohammedans and Pagans alike. He could have had a Bishopric in England for the asking, but the desert called him and he came. One week he'll be in Aden and the next he'll be in an Arab dhow living on a handful of dates, crossing the Red Sea to Somalia. A legendary figure. Even the Somalis look upon him as a holy man. He is in Mogadishu now and when he hears that you have a platoon of Ethiopians he'll be over here like a shot. They're mostly Christians, remember? During all the years he's been in these parts he's only had about a dozen converts, but he's never discouraged. Are you Church of England, by the way?

'Good. When the padre pitches up we'll rake you in for service and Holy Communion. He usually holds a short service in the sitting-room here.'

Refusing another drink and his invitation to dinner, for I thought I'd imposed on his hospitality long enough, I said good night. I walked slowly back to the cottage.

The night air was fragrant with the sweet, exotic scent of the frangipane blossoms. From the native village over the river a hyena called mournfully into the night and its weird, uncanny chuckle rose and fell in a cacophony of sound as it found food. A pie-dog yapped protestingly in reply as it slunk away from its evening meal, cowed by the scavenging hyena.

The full moon shone fitfully as the swaying palms and tangled creepers hid, then revealed its brilliance. A shaft of moonlight, like a long silvered spear, reached over the quietly flowing river only to disappear as the palm-fronds swayed again to hide the moon.

I awoke suddenly.

A rifle-shot rang out followed by a series of short, sharp blasts on a whistle which came from the direction of the village. Women screamed and their ululations were drowned by the hoarse, savage cries of men fighting. All the village pie-dogs now joined in with their shrill, yapping, persistent barks. The hyena, now far off, wailed his reply as the frightening commotion grew in intensity.

I was shocked into wakefulness as I sat up in bed, hurriedly thrusting aside the mosquito netting. The luminous hands on the dial of my watch

pointed to midnight. I fumbled for matches and lit a hurricane lamp. Putting on my uniform I kicked aside my boots, slipped my feet into a pair of Somali sandals, buckled on my Sam Browne, checking that the .38 revolver was loaded. Grabbing a torch I ran to the office.

A milling crowd of wildly excited Somalis, armed with spears, knives and clubs, their dark faces alive with passion, hindered my progress as I elbowed my way through them. Indo Adde's tribal police, armed with their .256 carbines, mingled with the crowd and it was then that I saw a group of my own askaris standing slightly apart, watchful, with bayoneted rifles at the ready.

Abdurrahman was trying to placate them. One was bleeding from a knife-wound in the arm and a second lay motionless in a pool of blood on the ground. A Somali headman was holding back a spearman who was menacing the tight little group with his spear. 'Abdurrahman,' I shouted. 'Where is Omar the interpreter?'

'Here, sahib,' answered Omar, appearing out of the crowd. He looked scared.

'What goes on?' I rapped out apprehensively as a further fusillade of shots rang out in the village. My hands were trembling. I was nervous and just a little afraid.

Indo Adde's quiet voice steadied me.

'Righto, Dougie. I'll handle this. Now then, Omar. Out with it.'

'Those bloody askaris,' Omar screamed. He pointed an accusing arm at the sullen little group.

'They go to village and break down doors with rifles to get womens. Not go to whore-shops. They go to good womens and virgins. Good womens not like. Virgins not like. They like sleep only with Somalis, they——'

'All right, Omar. That will do.' Indo Adde cut him short.

'Dougie, do you mind?'

'Abdurrahman, escort those askaris back to their lines, disarm them and put their rifles in my armoury. The Corporal of the Guard has the key. Any more trouble from them and they'll go straight back into jail. I'll hold an enquiry tomorrow. They can give me their story then. Call the hospital dresser and get these two into hospital.' He indicated the prone figure on the ground and the askari nursing his knife-wound.

'You armed, Dougie? Good. Now let's sort out this shauri in the village.' Accompanied by some dozen Somali chiefs we hurried to the village. Crossing the bridge over the river we entered the outskirts of the native quarter on the far bank. The village was a biggish one with conical, grass-

topped huts built in a semicircle with a large open space in the middle. It was full of fighting, swaying, screaming Somalis and the remnants of my platoon. Hysterical women were ululating, biting and tearing at the hard-pressed askaris.

'Fire a couple of shots over the lot of 'em,' Indo Adde said grimly. I drew my .38 and as the two shots reverberated over the heads of the struggling mass it quietened them, momentarily. During the lull Indo Adde addressed the crowd. He spoke quietly and dispassionately for about ten minutes. If the Ethiopian askaris were to blame they would be punished as also would the Somalis if they were found guilty of disturbing the peace. The enquiry would be held the following morning. His quiet bearing and remarkable personality, aided by the uniform he wore, for the British were an unknown quantity to the Somalis in those early days, quietened them and restored order. Both sides had suffered casualties, but the final reckoning would come in the morning. In the cold, impersonal atmosphere of Indo Adde's Court justice would be done. The Ethiopian askaris were guilty of provoking the fight and the Somalis knew it. They had already paid the price in blood. They would be punished again tomorrow.

Indo Adde spoke quietly. 'Get your chaps together and march them off. After you've done that return here with my truck as we've a few hospital cases. I'll hang on here until you get back, just to keep an eye on things.' Saluting, I marched off. By Jinks, I thought. What a man. Not a reproach for me or my men. Whatever Indo Adde thought he knew better than that for he realised to chastise us in front of the Somalis would immeasurably lower our prestige and that right or wrong it was not the men so much who had to be upheld but the uniform they wore. Arriving back half an hour later in his truck I had the hospital dresser with me.

'Could have been worse,' Indo Adde grunted. 'Not counting your men who made their way back to the office—the chum on the ground was dead I hear—you have four more wounded, one seriously. That is the extent of your casualties. Two Somalis have been bayoneted. One seriously. Several more are slightly hurt. The shots we heard were my Illalos firing over the heads of the "watu" trying to stop the fight. The Geledi chief has complained that two of his "gabdos" (unmarried girls) have been raped, and that several women, including the wives of my Illalos have been violated.'

As we walked slowly back I was silent. Damn and blast, I thought bitterly, but I've made a mess of this show. My first Command in Africa, I shall be for the high jump all right now. Indo Adde must have guessed

the thoughts passing through my mind, for he said kindly, 'Don't take this show too much to heart, it's not your fault. That stupid adjutant in Mogadishu should have known better than to have inflicted a shower like that on you. Shows like this are happening all over the country, and if you stay the course, as I think you will, you'll have your fill of mutiny, killings, murder, rape, and the lot. Cheer up.

'Rape, by the way,' he continued in a conversational tone. 'Do you think it's physically possible?'

'I've not found it necessary,' I replied seriously.

'Neither have I,' he grinned. 'But there's always a first time! Come on in and have a cup of coffee and we'll talk about women, or drink, as old Fellows would say, or both. Which do you prefer? Or perhaps you'd like to discuss something else?'

'Cricket,' I said firmly, thinking I was on a good wicket here, knowing little about wompo and even less about dingbats.

'Good-oh,' he smiled. 'You Pommy biscuits are hopeless. Now take the last Test Match——'

We discussed cricket until four in the morning over coffee and a bottle and a half of 'Millefiori', a potent Italian liquor. Well into the second bottle I was fairly well screechers and was watching Indo Adde executing a late cut with an imaginary bat, evidently his favourite shot, when in tottered Fellows-Smith with a glass in his hand.

'Ah,' he said. 'Golf. Now when I taught the Prince of Wales as he was then——'

'Oh, stone all the flipping crows,' groaned Indo Adde. 'I'm off to bed. Good night, chaps.'

I walked home, a little unsteady but happy. The village cockerels were already crowing at the false dawn as I fell asleep. I was dead to the world when Yusuf, the new boy, came in with tea. I awoke when he pulled the mosquito net gently from underneath my pillow.

There was a chit from Indo Adde on the saucer which said that he would hold his Court of Enquiry at 9 a.m. and would I attend.

'I'm going to hold Court in the form of a baraza.' He was brisk, almost abrupt. 'I phoned the brigadier early this morning and he's got your colonel to agree that the men who took part in the affray are to be tried under the jurisdiction of the Civil Court. Your colonel wants a full and detailed report from you. I've given instructions to have all the Somali participants of last night's show to meet us'—here he glanced at his watch —'in half an hour's time at the village. I reckon it will take a couple of days if I listen to all the evidence, for as far as I can gather all the virgins in

the village complain that they have been raped. I doubt whether there is one, by the way, but that's off the record.

'I've also instructed the chiefs and headmen to attend and the Somali wounded with the exception of the one wounded in the guts by a bayonet. He's not long for this world, I fancy. March up your platoon. They will be unarmed, of course. I'm going to have no more damned nonsense, either from the Somalis or your chaps, for I've got my Illalo force, about sixty strong, armed there. This is one of those shows when it is a good thing to display a little force and do a bit of flag waving.

'See you there in about twenty minutes. I've had a table and chairs placed for us under a large "Lebi" tree in the middle of the village. For your edification, young Douglas, the "Lebi" tree is a large thorn. Its wood is used for making camel bells. When you go on your first safari, which I don't think will be long, you will now know where the bells on your baggage camels come from. Now get cracking.' I tore him off a salute and went to organise my delinquents.

The baraza looked most impressive. Chiefs, headmen, married women in their traditional 'gambos', the head-dress or coiffure they affected made out of black linen, were all waiting. Unmarried girls with uncovered hair-do's in various attractive styles were in a little group on their own. Some eighty Somali fighting men, unarmed I noticed, were sullenly holding themselves aloof from the rest.

Surrounding the whole baraza, spaced at regular intervals in a large circle, were the tribal police or Illalos. One of them was trying to control a dozen curious Somali children. Pie-dogs loitered about the near-by huts and a herd of sheep and goats tended by a Somali yero meandered past on their way to the river, before being taken out to graze. I marched up, saluted Indo Adde, who was seated at a table with the Khadi on his left. He beckoned me into the vacant chair on his right. He was writing. Abdurrahman marched up the askaris and stood them at ease on the one vacant space obviously intended for them.

'You can instruct your chaps to sit down, Dougie,' said Indo Adde without looking up. 'There's no violent hurry.' I noticed that the forms, blue-coloured, on which he was writing were headed 'Court of Enquiry'.

He blotted his last sentence and glanced up at the sun, quite warm now, and already above the thorn tree, under which we were sitting. 'In a couple of hours it will be really hot and that will cool the ardour (sounds Irish I know) of those chaps over there.' He nodded his head towards the sullen group of bushy-haired, hawk-faced Somali warriors who flickered

their hot, unfriendly eyes from our table, to the Ethiopian askaris, then to their chiefs and finally to the armed Illalos surrounding them.

'They are assessing their chances on how far they can go if my judgment is not to their liking. I can read them,' he smiled.

'Now, Omar. All the accused must plead separately in their own words. Number 1 Safi Limasso. Guilty or not guilty?'

'He say, sahib, that he told the Collins Sahib yesterday that he wanted womans. The Collins Sahib told him that he could not have womans. He angry. Has now had womens. He happy.'

'H'm,' pondered Indo Adde, tugging at his ear and raising a quizzical eyebrow in my direction. 'Entered as a plea of guilty.'

One by one they all pleaded guilty to the charge as read out to them. 'This simplified matters quite a bit,' said Indo Adde writing furiously. He then read out a resumé of the facts of the case, quite fairly and impartially.

'Tell all the accused to stand up, Omar. Tell them that I find them guilty on their own admission. Now ask them if they have anything to say in mitigation of sentence.' He recorded the fact that they had nothing further to say.

'Well, that's that. As it is now half-past twelve I'll adjourn Court until two o'clock. Inform the accused, Omar.'

There was a murmur from the crowd, restive now at being cheated out of the pleasure of hearing the Ethiopians being sentenced and witnessing their humiliation. As we marched off three women ran forward and spat at us. They bared their teeth and screamed abuse which followed us as we marched over the bridge. At 2 p.m. we assembled again. The sun was now a searing hot ball of fire in the cloudless sky. 'Now, Dougie,' Indo Adde picked up his pen. 'Do you wish to say anything as Defending Officer in mitigation before I pass sentence?' This was rather a fast ball and it had me foxed, but as this was my first case I felt something was required from me.

'Yes, sir,' I said, standing up.

'It's a poor show I know, but as these chums have only just been released from clink where in some cases they have been incarcerated for as long as seven years I think something of this nature was bound to have happened. Added to that is the natural antipathy between the two races. I hope this Court will be lenient in its findings.' I sat down, mopping my brow. This was the longest speech I had made in my life.

'Omar,' called Indo Adde. 'Tell all the accused to stand up. It is the sentence of this Court that the accused will be removed from Afgoi. I shall recommend to the brigadier that they be dismissed from the Somalia

Gendarmerie and repatriated to their own country.' There was a pregnant silence from the assembled Somalis.

Instantly Haji Mohamed Elmi bounded to his feet and asked about the question of blood money for the wounded Somali who was likely to die, for the injured Somalis and for compensation to be paid to their violated womenfolk.

He turned round and in an impassioned and eloquent tirade appealed to his tribesmen for support who shouted, 'Dia. Dia. Diaken' (Blood money, blood money, give us blood money). Several leapt forward towards us only to be driven back by the armed Illalos.

Indo Adde flushed slightly and replied, 'The question of dia does not arise for you are of different tribes and religion. I have spoken. I am the Law.'

From lips twisted in a tight, mocking smile and with hate-filled eyes, Haji Mohamed snarled, 'Miedin shegtan? (Do you so tell?) There will be trouble—I too have spoken.' He angrily strode off, followed by his warriors.

At the insolence of his words, Indo Adde's Illalo sergeant moved as if to detain him, but at a gesture from Indo Adde desisted. We rose with the women surging forward, ululating and screaming. They tore open their dresses, exposing their breasts in a frenzy of frustrated cupidity.

'Dia,' they screamed. 'Lag (money) from the filthy unbelievers.'

'There will be no dia,' roared Indo Adde.

'Iss ka tag.' (Go.)

We walked off in a rather undignified manner, the Illalos holding off the frenzied women, their dark, perspiring faces distorted by passion, as they attempted to bar our passage.

'Well, you've learned a thing or two today,' Indo Adde spoke reflectively. 'The Somali bints are just like their European sisters. Avaricious and money hungry. They couldn't have cared less that your chums have had their fun and games with them for they're all born courtesans. They love it. For money.' I was a little shocked at his soliloquy. His words seared into me and caused me to doubt my romantic high ideals on women.

'Just in time to get a signal off to the brigadier,' Indo Adde interrupted my thoughts. 'You'd better wire your colonel, too, asking him to send a couple of "Trenta Quattros"—they're the big seven-ton Italian diesels. Put him in the picture. We must get these chums, all of them, out of it by tomorrow.'

'What about replacements?' I ventured to ask.

'Yes, ask for a relief platoon, they can travel down in the diesels. They'll pull finger after this shauri and send you better material I hope. In the meantime I'll instruct my Illalo sergeant to put a guard round your camp in case of further trouble. I've got the odd informer in the village and everything our friend Haji Mohamed cooks up, and he will, will be reported to me. Come on. We'll get off these signals and then relax. Do you play squash?' he asked as I was despatching my signal.

'Good-oh. There's nothing like a hard game for taking your mind off things. I've got a couple of racquets at the house. Join me after tea and we'll have a bash. The court is just behind the house.'

Changing into a singlet and white shorts and putting on a pair of tennis shoes I strolled down to his place later. As I approached I could hear him already having a work-out in the court. Hurrying along I found there was no door, so climbing a rickety ladder to the top of the court I jumped down and joined him. 'Don't break your neck—you're supposed to pull up the ladder, lower it on the inside, climb down, and then the yero pulls it up and lowers it when we've finished.

'Here's a racquet for you. Rough or smooth?'

'Rough.'

'Rough it is. Carry on,' he smiled, moving into the centre of the court. We played the best of seven games and I was beaten though not disgraced. He was surprisingly fast on his feet and what he lacked in speed he more than made up with good positional play. It was hellishly hot in the court and we were both perspiring freely.

'Let's get out of this oven. Boy!'

A half-naked yero appeared, grinning at the top of the wall. He lowered down the ladder to us.

The diesels arrived the following morning. I had just completed a detailed report to the colonel concerning the incident when I heard them pull up outside the office. They were crammed full with a platoon of Somalia Gendarmerie under the command of a full corporal. The way they de-bussed and immediately fell-in warmed my heart. Obviously well trained, for the most part young and well uniformed. Their bandoliers and belts were polished a rich brown. In spite of their journey from Mogadishu their boots still had a shine on them. They were mostly small men with black faces and squat noses. Most of them had their teeth filed to sharp points.

'Good. Wakamba,' said Indo Adde, who had just come out of his office. 'They come from the Machakos and Kitui areas of Kenya and have just been recruited into the Gendarmerie. You'll like them, for they make

damned good soldiers and get on well with the Somalis. They form about half the rank and file of the King's African Rifles. They're particularly good in the bush, being excellent scouts, and normally all the big-game hunting firms in Nairobi employ them as gun-bearers and trackers. Their filed teeth? Just a relic from the good old cannibal days,' he grinned. 'Most of them are minus their middle bottom teeth. It's the custom of their parents to draw these when young so that if they develop lockjaw, which is prevalent in their country, they can be forcibly fed. Well, I'll leave you to it. Get off the diesels with the Ethiopians as quickly as possible. Here comes your new corporal to report.'

A small, bow-legged N.C.O. marched up to me and saluted, slapping the butt of his rifle as he came to a halt a yard to my front. His cheerful black face glistened as he grinned, showing a mouthful of neatly-filed, gleaming teeth. 'Number 1220 Corporal Mulei, effendi. Platoon 'leady for 'spection,' he said.

Each askari came rigidly to attention and looked unwaveringly to his front as I slowly walked down their extended ranks. Each man gave me his number and name as I inspected him.

'Jambo,' I addressed one chum. 'Habari gani?' (What is the news?) 'Wewe iko bibi, na mtoto labda?' (You have a wife and children perhaps?)

A huge delighted smile as he replied, 'Ndio, effendi, iko bibi wawili na watoto sita huku Machakosi.' (Yes, sir, I have two wives and six children at Machakos.) The corporal informed me that they carried with them one month's rations and after off-loading the sacks of posho, a sort of maize-meal which is the down-country native's staple diet, sugar, tea, dates, etc., I then organised the Ethiopians into the empty diesels and said my good-byes to them. Abdurrahman was to accompany them to Mogadishu for reposting. It was with regret that I saw him go and he, in turn, seemed genuinely sorry to be leaving as he clambered up on the diesel and called, 'Nabad gelyo' (Good-bye, be in peace!) to me.

I liked the Wakamba from the word go. They were just like a lot of noisy, irresponsible children. Punish them for having a dirty rifle or being sleepy on night sentry and they would sulk for a few hours and then forget all about it as their natural cheerfulness asserted itself. Commend them for anything and they were simply shagged with happiness. Corporal Mulei was good, and after several days I promoted him sergeant. A Lance-Corporal Yulu I made up to full corporal. There were three lance-corporals already in the platoon and these with twenty-six privates completed my establishment.

It was Sunday. I was seated on the veranda of my house with a baby

dik-dik in my lap endeavouring to feed it with a pen-filler. It has been picked up on the outskirts of the village and the Chief of the Geledi had given it me as a present. It was about a week old. Its skin was of a soft cinnamon colour. It stood about five inches high on its trembling delicate legs. Its tiny toy horns were just showing through the frontal tuft of its hair. I was anxious to rear it as the dik-dik, called by the Somalis 'sakaro', is Africa's smallest antelope. It is common throughout the Somalilands and recently the Somalia Gendarmerie had chosen as its emblem two dik-dik horns which were mounted in a small silver badge. The dik-dik usually inhabit the waterless dry acacia thorn bush country and depend a great deal on dew for moisture. One seldom sees more than two together and if there is a third it is usually the offspring. At the moment I was spilling more milk over my shorts than into the baby sakaro, but once the filler-tip was firmly inserted into the side of his mouth I did much better.

These domestic operations had to be suspended when an Illalo came in from Indo Adde with a chit saying that Padre Cheshire had arrived and would I keep him company as the padre wished to hold a short service followed by Holy Communion. Sakaro by this time had scoffed about half a cup of milk and I handed him over the Yusuf for safe-keeping whilst I changed.

The padre and Indo Adde were having coffee in the lounge when I arrived. The dining table had been cleared and made into a temporary altar covered by a Union Jack. On it was placed a Bible, three hymn books, a flask of wine, a silver goblet and a plate containing little cubes of bread.

I shook the padre by the hand as Indo Adde made the introductions.

Padre Cheshire, of whom I had heard so much, was an old man. Small, white-headed with a spare, wiry figure, he was dressed in a crumpled khaki-drill suit and wore a clerical collar. He radiated kindliness.

'Ah, Douglas,' he said. 'So good of you to come along and swell the fold. I'm sorry to hear that your Ethiopians have left us but I must visit your Wakamba platoon later on. Are they Christians?'

'Half appear to be Christians and half Pagans, padre,' I answered.

'Wonderful, wonderful. Pagans you said. What a marvellous opportunity for converting them. So far,' he added wistfully, 'I've only had about a dozen converts in the thirty years I've travelled these parts. All Mohammedans you know, and it doesn't do to interfere with their own religion, which suits their way of life admirably. Pagans, now, that's a different matter. What scope. Well, if you'll both excuse me for a moment I'll change and then we'll begin service. Our hymn for the day

will be "As pants the hart for cooling streams". Here's a hymn book for you both. I won't keep you a moment.'

The service started with the hymn, both Indo Adde and myself out of tune perhaps, but nevertheless singing with a will. We had barely commenced the second verse when the dining-room door opened and closed with a bang. In tottered Fellows-Smith. He was naked except for a sheet draped round him. He was barefooted. He looked like a fargone Nero.

'I want to be a whore. I want to be a whore,' he shouted, then suddenly focusing his eyes on the table he teetered over, seized the flask, shakily poured the wine into the goblet and drank deeply. There was a shocked silence.

Indo Adde rose swiftly. Seizing Fellows-Smith he bodily bundled him out of the room and turned the key in his bedroom door.

'Goodness me,' said the poor padre. 'Whatever would the bishop say?' We continued with the service as if nothing untoward had happened.

'Do you know, Ray, I'm really worried about poor Fellows-Smith. Isn't there anything we can do?' the padre enquired. We were having coffee after the service.

'Don't think so, Padre. He's a gone duck if ever I saw one,' replied Indo Adde.

The good padre need not have worried. Fellows-Smith finished up a few weeks later on at Muthari, the bug-house in Nairobi.

'I must be off,' said the padre rising. 'So nice to have met you, Douglas. I've to rendezvous with an Arab trader outside Patzimas's, who has promised me a lift back to Mogadishu in his lorry. Thank you for putting me up, Ray. Good-bye to you both. Oh, Douglas, may I have a few words with your Wakamba before I go and I will arrange a service for them next week?'

'Most certainly, Padre,' I answered him.

'And here's a little something for you from Mogadishu—I'd almost forgotten.' It was a sponge cake. I was touched.

He shook hands with us both, refused a lift back to the village in Indo Adde's truck, slung his haversack over his shoulder, picked up his staff and slowly walked down the drive. A gentle Christian. Lonely in everything but his God, he was an unforgettable character.

A week passed during which time I started to build new lines for my men, using the Somali women as labour with the gendarmes supervising the work. My command of the Swahili and Somali languages was growing apace. The former I found easy to learn, but Somali, with its strong guttural pronunciation and lack of written grammar, I found difficult,

even to the point of stringing together the odd sentence. In the evenings we had our invariable game of squash and the time passed pleasantly.

My training programme for the Gendarmerie platoon was now in operation and working smoothly. Early one morning as we were stripping the ex-Italian Breda machine gun, Indo Adde strolled along. He looked worried and seemed angry.

'Would you come along to the office with me, Dougie?' he asked as I fell in step with him. He told me that three Garre tribesmen had just arrived in from their dry-weather grazing near Ardegle. They were part of a village there and had been attacked by a large raiding party of Galgail.

'They might be exaggerating but they say they're the only surviving members of their clan. We'll question them. I'd like you to listen to their story.'

In his office I saw the Garre chief, Abdi Omar, together with his headman, Ali Hersi. Their faces betrayed their bitterness at the news brought in by the three warriors who stood in the middle of the room dressed in their travel-stained tobes. They each carried a stabbing spear, a long, thin, pliant shaft, cut from the 'Dibi' or 'Makari' tree, dried, polished and greased with ghee, an unclarified butter. The blade was about a foot long. They had knives thrust in their leather belts—the Somali dagger, about eighteen inches long, double-edged with a horn handle. They wore them strapped to their waist-belt by a thong sewn to the sheath. One of them was wounded in the arm, which had recently been bandaged.

The wounded Somali spoke excitedly.

'It was the day before yesterday,' interpreted Omar, 'when the sixth hour was near. They are of the section, Garurus, and they were grazing 'bout three herds of camels near Donca Adega——'

'About sixty miles north of here,' muttered Indo Adde. 'It is now eight o'clock. Assuming they escaped from the fight round about 6 a.m. it's taken them roughly fourteen hours to get here.' I worked this out mentally and looked up at the three Garre in admiration. They had averaged about four and a half miles an hour which was some going, considering the distance they had covered.

Omar continued. 'There were 'bout twenty fighting mens in the "rer", twelve womens and some old, old mens and a few yeros. They had only poor manyatta as little water—they move all time and so bad zariba (thorn fence) round peoples.'

'He means,' explained Indo Adde, 'that the rer, or clan, continually on the move for grazing and water only made a temporary boma and did

not bother building themselves a good thorn zariba which would have afforded them more protection from the raiders——'

At this point the wounded Somali trembled. Gripping his spear with clenched hand he violently called out, 'Silei! Silei!'

'What does silei mean, Omar?' rapped out Indo Adde.

'It mean torture, sahib.' A further torrent of despairing words came from the Garre spokesman. Blood was slowly seeping through the bandage on his arm, staining the white linen crimson. His face was grey with pain and fatigue. He swayed on his feet.

'Tell him to sit down, Omar,' said Indo Adde, gently.

'He say, sahib, that those mens not killed by Galgails were all tortured.'

'What section were the Galgail?'

'Dirasama, sahib.'

'How many fighting men?'

' 'Bout forty spearmen and half, 'praps twenty bowmen, sahib.'

'Any rifles?'

'No, sahib.'

'Any other weapons?'

'Yes, sahib. They throw bom-boms in zariba before attack.'

'Who was leading the Dirasama?'

'Aden Yeber, sahib.'

'How does he know?'

'He recognised that mans, sahib. He say he saw him at baraza two month ago when you 'warded the Garre seven hundred camels as dia from Galgails.'

'Ask the other two separately if he speaks the truth?'

'They say yes, sahib.'

'Ask Chief Abdi Omar if he remembers the Galgail Aden Yeber attending my last baraza?'

'Yes, sahib. I 'member also.'

'H'm.' Indo Adde tugged at his ear reflectively. 'I think on this occasion we're getting the truth for a change.'

'Have you any questions, Dougie?'

'Just one. How does he know that the survivors of the fight were tortured?'

'Good point. Ask him Omar.'

The Somali raised his head slowly and looked at us. His eyes were twin pools of pain and despair.

'I saw,' he said dully. 'I heard. Wa runtis (It is true). Illahha hagge by Jira? (Where is God?)'

'Right, Omar. Now listen and listen carefully.

'Sergeant! Take these three Garre to your lines and look after them. Call the dresser and have a new bandage put on that man's arm. I don't want them to go to the village or speak to anyone. All understand?' The Garre chief and his headman nodded assent. The sergeant herded the three Garre outside. They were out on their feet.

'Abdi Omar.' Indo Adde addressed the Garre chief.

'I want twenty camels with five lenders (camel men) here at the office within the hour.' They salaamed and went out.

'Omar, call back the sergeant. Now, Dougie. You're on the wing. You're off on safari. It is now nine o'clock. I want you to be off by eleven. Ah, sergeant. I want one section of Illalos ready within one hour to go on safari with the Collins Sahib. You will go with them. You'll probably be away a week to ten days. Issue fifty rounds of ammunition to each man. Get ten barrimils (drums) of water ready for loading on the camels. Off you go.

'How many Wakamba can you spare, Dougie?'

'Let me think for a moment,' I replied. I was excited at the thoughts of my first safari with the possibility of a fight at the end of it. 'I've got three sick. Two on leave. Lance-Corporal Buno is on a course. That leaves me with twenty-five men including the sergeant. I've got a permanent twenty-four-hour guard on the armoury of one N.C.O. and three men. That cuts it down to seventeen men. I could take Sergeant Mulei and fourteen askaris.'

'Good! Get hold of your sergeant now and tell him to have his men ready. Full marching order, but I'll leave all the details to you. I suggest you take rations for fourteen days. Buzz off and get your own kag ready and then come back here where I'll brief you.' I saluted happily. A safari. A foot safari with camels at last. At long last I was going into the Shag. I ran off to my bungalow.

'Yusuf,' I called, 'O Yusufo. Dakso (Hurry).

'Funga kitanda na chop-box yangu na pata wote tayari kwa safari,' I ordered. In my excitement I pulled out the chop-box from underneath the bed and hurriedly threw in tins of bully-beef, milk, sausages, tinned bacon, a packet of tea, coffee, sugar and a few packets of biscuits and dates. Into my valise I put a torch, extra stockings, a change of clothing, shaving kit, towel, and a pair of field-glasses. Yusuf, I thought, can now do his damndest. I had the essentials. Telling him to pull finger I returned to the office for my briefing.

Indo Adde wasted no time. 'If the alleged attack has in fact taken place,

and I do not think the Garre were lying, I want the Galgail, particularly the Dirasama section, made an example of. Haji Mohamed Elmi I am sure is behind all this. Arrest Aden Yeber if you can but don't go out of your way to chase him if he's left the vicinity of Donca Adega. If you do arrest him I'll only put him in clink and that means nothing at all to a Somali. Take away his stock though, that's a different matter. That really hurts them.

'A Somali reckons his principal wealth in his camels, his cattle, his sheep and his goats. That then will be your primary job. Any stock, Galgail stock, near the Donca Adega area confiscate and bring in here. Quite apart from the attack on the Garre the Galgail have flagrantly disregarded my express instructions on grazing and that in itself constitutes an offence. Firstly then, seize any stock whatsoever in that area, and secondly arrest any Galgail who took part in the affray. Here's a map to take with you. Look. You will see that Donca Adega is about sixty miles north of here. Follow the Afgoi road until you reach Balad for about thirty miles. Then you cut in on this track you see here through Deimadera and Ambohile until you reach Donca Adega. You should come across water at Deimadera but don't count on it. Here, I'll loan you my rifle. It's a .256 Manlicher Schroener.

'You've got your own two sections of Gendarmerie plus a section of my Illalos and it will be useful for shooting meat. The Wakamba especially are big meat eaters and anything you can shoot for them will keep 'em happy on the safari. I don't think the Galgail will risk an attack on your force but they may try something once you've seized their stock. I'd put out night sentries when you camp and don't get yourself surprised in the bush. It conceals hostile movement and favours surprise in attack. Consequently protection from all directions is essential and dispositions must be as elastic as possible in order to meet sudden emergencies. It's quite impossible to carry out a patrol in a square or triangular formation for any length of time owing to the distance that has to be covered and the exhaustion entailed upon the men if they march through the bush in any set formation. You will find file or single file the only way, and then if you are attacked form a square or a triangle and let them have it. The bush is damned thick in that area and you will find visibility limited to fifteen yards, sometimes even less so that it is vital for a front on all sides to be formed immediately anything happens. Happy? Good. Now let's see what progress is being made about getting you off.'

My fourteen Gendarmerie under Sergeant Mulei were working with a will helping the five lenders (camel men) rope up their camels whilst the

Illalos were sorting out the various rations and water barrimils into separate camel loads. The Somali camel as a baggage animal is invaluable and can carry up to four hundred pounds in weight. They are quite gentle and only grumble and become fractious when they are overloaded. They are not riding animals as is the 'Racoub'. For loading, the 'herio' or baggage saddle is used; it consists of a set of three fibre and grass mats which are tied on the camels' back with rope to form a pad. The load is then evenly distributed and balanced on each side with the whole securely lashed.

The Somali normally carry their water in vessels of wood and plaited bark called 'hans', but they invariably leak and are apt to taint the water. I was lucky, I thought, in having Indo Adde's military-type barrimils with secure screw tops. They each contained eight gallons of water. Five of the camels had been cut out a little apart from the rest and the owner, assisted by a couple of Illalos, was busy lashing the barrimils one on each side of his camels.

At length our caravan was ready for safari with the four groups of five camels tied nose to tail. I sent one section of Gendarmerie as a point section under Sergeant Mulei a couple of hundred yards ahead with one of the Illalos to act as a scout. The section of Illalos were to accompany the camels with the four lenders, the remaining Gendarmerie section to bring up the rear.

With a little coaxing the camels lumbered to their feet and we were off. A camel safari will only average two and a half to three miles an hour and as we crossed the bridge over the Uebe Scebelli I glanced at my watch. The time was a few minutes after 11 a.m. As we passed through the village the long, winding, red sandy road lay ahead of us. Omar the interpreter walked alongside me and as we pushed along slowly he chattered incessantly. I began to learn something about the lore of the Shag.

Little ground squirrels and sand lizards scuttled out of our path. The Somalis I learned were generally uninterested in birds, calling all the varieties 'shimber'; but as a greater bustard, a large, grey game-bird, bigger than a turkey, stalked in between the thorn-scrub bordering each side of the road, I made a mental note that he called it a 'chugli'.

We flushed a brace of lesser bustard which spiralled up in the air with their harsh discordant cries. One flew over us, closed its wings then plummeted down to earth away on our left. Becoming a little tired of the pungent smell of camels we increased our pace until we caught up with the point section ahead.

Sand-grouse, lying very close, their speckled colour camouflaged

against the sand, fluttered out of our way with their throaty chuckle as they winged away. We disturbed a gerenuk doe with a few-weeks'-old fawn taking shade under a low acacia. The gerenuk, or Waller's gazelle is quite distinct from all the other gazelle family. Occasionally it is called the giraffe gazelle on account of its extraordinarily long neck which enables it, standing on its hind legs, to browse off the upper branches of the thorn trees. The doe moved off with a most peculiar, inelegant, trot-like gait with neck extended horizontally to the front and head kept low. She had a handsome, light-chestnut-coloured coat, darker on the sides with a light-fawn colour on the underparts. The dainty little fawn stood looking at us for a moment through limpid eyes, then trotted away after its mother. Looking back I found that we had outstripped the camels and so we had a welcome five minutes by the roadside in order to allow them to catch up. Off again, and the keen eyes of Omar pointed into the desert on our left. A herd of some twenty reticulated giraffe were browsing off the acacias. They moved off as we went past with a peculiar, slow-motion gait, appearing to float through the bush. With their liver and white markings they are much more handsome than the giraffe of Kenya and Tanganyika. Omar told me that their hides are highly prized by the Somalis for making sandals and water-buckets. We crossed a 'lac', a dried water-course, with the sun high now and even hotter. Here a family of wart-hogs, the boar with huge tusks, dashed out from cover and trotted up the dried-out stream bed. Ugly animals with their long heads and unsightly warts, but so comical as the boar and sow, followed in single file by a litter of eight piglets, all with tails erect, made for safety.

Omar spat. 'Donfar,' he said contemptuously, as I half brought up the Manlicher to my shoulder thinking of meat for the evening. He was horrified.

'We Somalis no eat. No touch. Unclean. Later we see kudu. p'raps arrigas. You shoot then, sahib.'

It was now one o'clock with the sun a flaming bowl in the sky. My shirt, wet with perspiration, stuck lovingly to my back; little rivulets of sweat ran down my chest and I thought I could now call midday halt without any loss of 'heshima', or face. The bush had now grown fairly thick, was dotted with 'hig aloe', a Sansevieria shrub with sharply-pointed leaves and blossoms of red and yellow. The informative Omar explained that lesser kudu abounded in this country and ate the leaves off this particular tree. The bush was really thick now so we plodded on until we reached a pleasant little clearing clumped with bunches of durr grass which Omar said the camels could graze off. Calling the caravan to a halt I

gratefully stretched out under a large acacia, thankfully seeking the shade it afforded from that hellish, energy-sapping sun.

Sergeant Mulei came up and saluted.

'We'll make camp here for one hour, sergeant, and have tea,' I told him. The camels were off-loaded and hobbled by a short piece of rope round the front legs, which allowed them to take short, jerky steps to graze, but at the same time kept them reasonably close to our midday camp.

Yusuf opened up the chop-box, taking out the kettle and a few bits and pieces. Within twenty minutes I was munching away at a packet of dates and drinking tea. Delicious tea which assuaged my thirst. Neither the Somalis nor the Wakamba had so far touched their water-bottles so I had followed suit, but it had taken all my will power to keep my hands off the bottle as it slapped away on my buttocks during the march.

Lazily resting, I squirmed my way under the acacia, its shadow diminishing as the sun rose higher.

My siesta came to an end when Sergeant Mulei reported that he had seen kudu beyond the grazing camels. This was a chance not to be lost, for if I shot a kudu we could tie it on one of the camels when we reloaded them in about half an hour.

Mulei took us over the durr grass, through a clump of Sansevieria, past the grazing camels, where we crouched down. We looked out over an open little glade and following the line of the sergeant's pointing arm I saw three forms partly visible under the Sansevieria about seventy yards away. They moved a little into the open and I saw my first kudu. One was a bull. A good head with ivory-tipped spiralled horns, he was grazing with two does.

'Nyama' (meat), hissed Mulei in Swahili.

'Ilib,' echoed Omar in Somali as I pushed forward the safety-catch and took careful aim just behind the bull's shoulder.

'Crack' spoke the Manlicher, followed by an immediate 'thunk' which told me that the bullet had gone home. The poise of the elegant head faltered, he staggered, then bounded away followed by his consorts. I was dumbfounded. I just couldn't have missed at that range.

'Napiga, napiga' (a hit, a hit), shouted Mulei racing forward with myself and Omar tearing after him. There he lay, a hundred yards further on, with his pretty striped coat stained crimson over the heart. Several of the Somali antelopes are lovely creatures, but I award the palm of beauty to the lesser kudu. Mulei pumped me by the hand. He was overjoyed. 'Nyama,' he kept saying, 'Nyama'.

Omar was upset. 'Dead, sahib,' he said. 'Dead.'

'I can't "chinger" it, so we Mohammedans no eat.'

Evidently any game killed for the Somalis must be properly 'bismillah'd' before it dies; that is, its head must be turned towards Mecca and then with ceremony its throat is cut. He looked so woebegone that I promised to shoot the Somalis another antelope during the day although I knew it would grieve me to see another kudu, so lovely, with its lifeblood staining the sand.

Aided by a couple of gendarmes we dragged the kudu to our midday resting-place and I gave orders to load up. The camel chosen to carry the kudu was already carrying two sacks of posho and the 'gel' objected most strongly to this additional burden. He gurgled and buck-jumped to show his displeasure, dislodging the kudu twice. It was then tied on again so tightly that he finally submitted, though with a very bad grace on his outraged, supercilious face. We moved again with the sun's heat searing down on us. Nothing moved and Omar said that all the game was now resting in the thickets for shade from the heat of the day. We plodded on, following the remorseless, never-ending road until the sun lost its midday fierceness and mercifully the heat was less oppressive.

Three dik-dik dashed across the road, bounding at speed, in a series of stiff-legged jumps. Myriads of pink and white butterflies gladdened the eye as they fluttered on the Sansevieria blossoms bordering both sides of the road. As the heat diminished the desert began to live again.

Hornbills appeared, weaving and dipping their undulating way over us. Exotic jays with their shimmering iridescent blue feathers chattered to us. I saw my first hoopoe with its crested feathered crown. Partridges of the francolin family scurried underfoot and seldom took to the air. A cloud of sand-grouse passed high overhead winging their way to the river. Weaver birds flew and twittered among a colony of nests in a large acacia. Each nest as light as gossamer as it swayed suspended from a single thorn. I picked up a feather of dark blue, lying like a glittering jewel in our path as we marched on. It was good to be alive and I rejoiced with the birds, whose presence was rarely lacking except during the oppressive midday heat. At length, an hour before sunset, I reckoned we had covered some fifteen miles and when we reached a clearing in the bush fringed by large acacias I decided to camp there for the night.

The camels came to a grumbling halt and needed no word of command from their lenders to fall thankfully to their knees for off-loading. It was a pleasant camping-site and feeling shagged, I was not at all enthusiastic when Omar asked me to try and shoot the Mohammedans' meat. Leaving the Illalo sergeant to supervise the off-loading and setting-up of camp I

posted my sentries then resignedly made my way to the edge of the plain followed by Omar and the inexhaustible Sergeant Mulei. We immediately saw a flock of eight ostriches, one male resplendent in his black and white plumage and his seven dowdier-looking consorts. With their huge naked thighs they looked like a troop of female ballet dancers. Suddenly taking alarm at our approach they were off, dodging this way and that, helped along by their flapping wings. Mulei had his nose to the ground like a trained bloodhound and pointed out what I took to be recent spoor on the ground.

'Ba'id,' shouted Omar excitedly, only to be crushed at a reproving look for his noisy outburst from Mulei.

'Oryx,' he breathed. He pronounced it 'Arrigis'.

Weaving our way for about fifteen minutes through the Sansevieria we came suddenly across a small herd. They were wary but under Mulei's expert tuition we approached through the bush down wind until we were within a hundred yards of them. The Beisa oryx is a splendid-looking animal with his black and white face markings in striking contrast. His long, slender scimitar horns curve slightly backwards and are annulated half-way up from the base. The males have thicker horns than the females. Lying down I cuddled the Manlicher, drawing a bead on a fine buck in the herd. He went down. The herd panicked and dashed off, the wounded bull taking a line of his own as he struggled gamely to his feet. Reloading I gave him another, which felled him, and we then closed in. He was wonderfully tenacious of life as he again stood up, then lowering those sharp, curved horns, he gallantly faced us. Mulei and Omar circled him, approaching from the rear whilst I covered them.

A quick rush and they seized him by the horns. Omar drew his dagger, quickly despatching him as he struggled to the last. He severed the jugular vein and so the blood flowed through a Mussulman hand. He uttered an invocation to Allah. Waving aloft the blood-stained dagger he boasted:

'O Be'id, thy horns are sharp, but my knife is sharper.'

'Ilib, ilib, Ilah Mahaddi!' (Meat, meat, thanks to God!)

The Law of the Shag: kill or be killed, I mused regretfully as I looked down at the oryx, his eyes now glazed by the death which had so suddenly come to him. Leaving Mulei with the dead oryx to keep away any scavenging hyenas and vultures, Omar and I slowly walked back to camp only to meet a baggage camel led by two jubilant Illalos. Hearing the shots they had anticipated meat for the evening. The camp was bustling with activity on our return. More than half the Wakamba were cutting down 'Jirin' trees and building a large circular zariba, carefully laying

down the branches so that the long, wicked thorns pointed outwards. The rest of the men had already skinned the kudu and were engaged in cutting it up. The Illalos were carrying the rations and water-barrimils into the half-built zariba whilst the lenders were herding their hobbled camels grazing outside.

Sitting in my camp-chair I contentedly sipped the tea Yusuf had prepared. The sunset glow now faded. A jackal barked away, short, staccato yaps which were answered by the hyenas' long-drawn-out hunting call from the direction of the dead oryx.

'Waraba. Waraba,' laughed Omar.

'Fisi, fisi,' echoed the Wakamba showing their filed teeth as they happily cut up their meat.

'What is so funny about the hyena, Omar?' I asked curiously.

'He he and she at same time, sahib,' he laughed, whilst the Wakamba, thinking this the biggest joke in history, roared their appreciation at Omar's description of the hermaphroditical hyena.

'Cheka. Cheka. That is why he laughs,' explained Mulei with a huge grin who had just reported in with the oryx lashed to the back of a camel. More shrieks of merriment from the Wakamba. Omar further explained that generally hyenas are loathed as unclean and hated as stock killers, but they are considered to have brains like men and infinite guile. The zariba was complete—a thorn fence about six feet high and twenty yards across into which the lenders now herded their camels for the night. Three camp fires were burning and crackling brightly. One for the Wakamba, one for the Somalis and my own kitchen fire.

Posting sentries I made my way through the belching, gurgling camels, for we all shared the zariba together. Most of them were contentedly sitting down, wetly chewing their cud and drooling green saliva from their rubbery lips as they regurgitated from their stomachs the acacia leaves and durr grass they had just eaten. Their acid-sharp, pungent smell pervaded the whole camp. I made the Illalos and Gendarmerie dig shallow rifle pits, spaced at regular intervals facing outwards on the inside of the thorn perimeter. They would sleep there with their arms through the slings of their rifles. My bed looked inviting so I stripped off my uniform, slipped into my lungi and flopped down.

A sonorous call from Omar and the Illalos and lenders came for evening prayer.

'Allah! Allah!' he called as they gathered in a half-circle around him, each man kneeling on his praying-carpet of tanned leather. At another call from him they all stood up gazing meditatively into the night, their

hands crossed on their chests for several seconds. Then they knelt again, each man bending forward three times, pressing his forehead on the sand.

'Allah! Allah! Allah Akbar!' Omar called.

The prayers went on for the best part of half an hour.

The pagan Wakamba were busy eating.

'Dinner, sahib,' said Yusuf quietly. I sat up on my bed, ate oryx steak and liver which was really good. As I sipped away at my coffee Mulei came over with a cracked oryx leg-bone, a clean sliver of wood and invited me to eat. I poked out the marrow which made one of the most delicious meals I have ever tasted. I thanked him and told him to instruct the early-morning sentry to wake me at dawn. I was replete.

The camp settled down for the night but not so the hyenas. They soon winded the fresh meat, after having finished off the offal where I had shot the oryx. The night was made hideous with their concert, an uncanny wailing which they kept up for most of the night.

There was no moon, but the stars shone friendlily. I could make out the Great Bear and the Southern Cross.

I slept, lulled into slumber by the hollow sound of the bells as the camels settled down for the night.

Yusuf woke me with tea.

Then came the dawn, grey-veiled and silent, whilst a little wind stole past. The desert was filled with the soft, shy colours of early morning. The camp awoke and hummed with life. Sergeant Mulei none too gently awoke the Wakamba still sleeping and the Illalo sergeant in his guttural Somali rasped out, 'Ka, ka' (Get up, get up).

The duty sentry relaxed and spat.

Hastily donning my soiled uniform I walked around the zariba. The camels came to life as the herios were lifted on their backs, complainingly grunting as the ropes were tightened around their bellies. A furtive hyena skulked away followed by two jackals—his scavenging accomplices. Half a dozen vultures with a hop, skip and a jump soared into the air. The camels lumbered to their feet and we were off just before six. Loitering awhile and letting them get into their stride I called Mulei over and asked him to show and familiarize me with the various spoor I had noticed around camp. He showed me hyena spoor, which I learned was not unlike lion, though smaller and longer with well-defined claw marks.

The lion's claws, like the leopard's, do not show in their spoor. I saw the much smaller spoor of the jackal—and leopard.

'Shabel, by God!' theatrically ejaculated Omar, who had joined us. They were like lion's spoor in miniature, but because the leopard treads

lightly are not so well defined and except on soft ground are hard to track. The leopard, apparently, had prowled around our zariba but finding that we had neither sheep nor goats with us had gone away hungry. No one evidently had heard him that night. We hurried on and caught up with the swaying camel convoy ahead.

The bush grew dense again with the clawing fingers of the 'wait-a-bit' thorns reaching out in places over the road. With startling suddenness a large flock of vulturine guinea-fowl burst out of the thorn-scrub and winged away in all directions with their rattling cry of alarm. Brilliant birds, with their neck feathers of black and white and breasts of cobalt blue.

A parrot, swift of flight, just a flash of green and orange, flew through a flock of bee-eaters, lovely gregarious birds, circling in the sky, then swooping down in carmined streaks to snatch up insects off the herbage.

Doves, olive green and lilac, fluttered in our path, whilst from the road-side came a fragrant aroma as the camel loads caught and bruised the branches of overhanging aromatic shrubs as we passed.

Ahead, the Wakamba point section, their bellies full of meat and with hearts as light as mine, were singing endlessly and repetitively the old King's African Rifles marching song:

'Funga safari, funga safari,
Amri ya K.A.R. Amri ya K.A.R.,
Amri ya bwana. Amri ya bwana,
Amri ya Kaayaarrrrrrrrr.'

Oh, I thought, let the slickers in Mogadishu have their dingbats, their wives, their white mistresses, their Somali mistresses, their elevenses for gin and their dusty files of bumph. What cared I?

What could they know of the loveliness of the desert?

A red ant-hill, towering above us, leaned grotesquely over the road as we swung past, the camels lurching to one side to avoid dislodging their loads. The inexorable sun began its tireless climb into the sky and after marching for another two hours we thankfully reached the Deimadera track which wound its way at a right-angle from the road. Here we found a large deshek, or water-pan, the edges caked hard and criss-crossed by huge cracks in the dried-out mud. A little green stagnant water remained in the middle. A Somali karia was encamped in an open space near by. Calling halt, for it was now close on eleven, I flung myself under a large umbrella thorn and watched the swaying camels arrive to an untidy stop. Omar came up with three wild-looking Somalia warriors.

They each carried a spear and from their belts protruded a knife and a throwing-stick. Porcupine quills decorated their long bushy hair and their tobes were of a reddish colour. They carried the usual praying-carpet of tanned leather, folded up on their shoulders. Threaded on their wrists were their ornamental head-rests carved from the 'Malmal', a myrrh tree. Tied above the muscle on their left arms was a small leather pouch containing koranic charms. They stood a few yards to my front, aloof and proud, whilst all the time their wild, untamed eyes were flickering from me to my mixed body of Gendarmerie and Illalos. One of them stood like a stork, his right leg folded up, resting on his left knee. He cleaned his teeth with a stick. He spat and continued polishing his teeth.

'Nabat,' I said.

There was no reply.

'Omar, their tribe?' I asked.

'Rahanwein.' This from the warrior cleaning his teeth. He spat again.

'Where do they come from?'

'They say nowhere, sahib,' replied Omar.

'Where are they going?'

'They say nowhere, sahib.'

(Oh, give me patience I prayed.)

Omar came to my help.

'I already asked womens and childrens—they are Galgails, sahib. See that camel? It has Galgails brand on neck. Two lines and dot. This Galgails karia, sahib. These mens lie.'

'Sergeant Mulei,' I called. He ran up, smacking the butt of his rifle as he stood quivering to attention.

'Disarm these three Somalis and tie them up with camel rope. We are taking them prisoner.'

Mulei half-turned and yelled, 'Kayanda, Toto, Buno, Mrefu, Yulu—Kuja. Fix bayonets. Kwa ngufu toa mkuke na visu yao na funga hawa,' he ordered.

Menaced by the glittering steel the three Somalis lost a little of their arrogance. They were disarmed none too gently and whilst three askaris presented the points of their bayonets at their chests, the other two quickly and expertly tied their wrists behind them. They looked at me contemptuously, their eyes narrowed and glittering with enmity.

'Ask them their tribe again, Omar,' I queried.

'Galgail,' they spat out.

'Section, Omar?'

'Diraisama,' they hissed.

'Where do they come from?'

'From over there.' Omar pointed to the west. To Garre country.

'Where are they going?'

'Nearer the Uebe Scebelli, where they can get more water, sahib.'

'What do they know of the fight between the Garre and the Galgail at Donca Adega a few days ago?'

'They say they know nothings, sahib.'

'What are they doing on this side of the road in Garre country?'

'They say they Galgails, sahib. They say they can water and graze where they like.'

Good, I thought. I've established their section and clan and they admit trespassing in Garre country. For all I know they may themselves have taken part in the fight for Donca Adega is only fifteen miles from here. I pondered on the situation. An Illalo brought up a 'tebed', a vessel made out of camel leather which the Somalis use for drinking milk and carrying ghee. It was brimful of foamy camel's milk straight from the udder. I drank deeply, watched begrudgingly by the three Galgail. Oh, it was so good. Cow's milk under certain conditions may result in T.B. to the drinker. If one is unlucky goat's milk can bring on the fatal Malta fever, a form of brucellosis. I was not to know then, for who can look into the unforeseeable future? but poor Peter, a fellow subaltern, died from that deadly sickness a year later.

Camel's milk, however. That really is the staff of life. Nectar of the gods.

'Omar.' I paused in between mighty draughts of milk.

'How many camels do you think the Galgail are grazing here?'

He turned round and surveyed the scattered karia then began his estimation, ticking off the numbers on his fingers—

'Kow, laba, sadeh, afarr, shan. Five hundred, sahib. Mebbe more. There are 'bout thirty womens and p'raps forty spearmen but most of these out with yeros grazing camels.'

'Call up the two sergeants.'

At Omar's urgent call they marched up together and saluted.

'Sergeant Mulei, put a guard on these three prisoners, then get the rest of your Gendarmerie and Illalos building a strong zariba. We camp here for the night.'

He saluted and went, herding the three Somalis in front of him.

'Maga'a?' I addressed the Illalo sergeant, for I did not know his name.

'Garad Mohamed,' he replied.

'Kabil-ka?'

'Galgail.'

'What section is he, Omar?'

'Makahil, sahib.'

I mused on this for I intended at first light to seize on half of the herd of camels as a preliminary to my first punitive measures against the Galgail. If I made a bog then Indo Adde could easily return them at Afgoi. Could I trust the Galgail sergeant though?

'Omar, ask him how long he has been an Illalo sergeant and how many Galgail Illalos have I got with me apart from himself?'

'He say, sahib, he Illalo sergeant since the Inglesi came. Before that he sergeant-major of Dubas for seven years with Italianos. He say other Illalos, Rahanwein, Garre, Geledi, and Uadan. No more Galgails.'

I'll take a risk on it, I thought. I don't like splitting my force but I'll send him back to Afgoi with the stock I seize tomorrow with the rest of the Illalos. If they get off at first light they will be able to make camp within striking distance of Afgoi. I can send one of the Illalos ahead with a chit for Indo Adde who can send out reinforcements to their camp in case of trouble.

'Right, Omar. Thank him and tell him to dismiss.'

After his dismissal I idly watched marabou storks, cruising and wheeling lazily at a great height over the karia.

Scavengers, they are unlovely brids, more of a vulture than a stork with their backs a slaty-green colour and white bodies. Their head, neck and chest are bare, giving them an obscene look. A single bird was standing on one leg half-way between myself and the karia. It had an attitude of profound meditation. Omar disturbed my own thoughts.

'What you going do, sahib?' he asked with an inquisitive, speculative look.

He was nobody's fool, Omar, and he had obviously deduced from my questioning of Sergeant Garad that in all probability I would punish the Galgail Diraisama for their trespass into Garre country. I decided not to enlighten him.

'Nothing yet,' I replied.

He was disappointed and looked at me reproachfully as he salaamed and walked away. It was now lunch-time but the camel's milk had so filled me that I had no further appetite. I decided to walk round the karia. Omar, thinking that perhaps he could get some griff out of me if he persisted, came along.

He had, apparently, forgotten my seeming lack of confidence in him for he was at his most talkative and eager to please. We reached the karia.

'Galgails karia only arrive yesterday, sahib. Look. Womens still building.'

He explained that when the Somali arrives at any place whatever, the women sweep it, before constructing their tents, the 'gurgi'. They then thrust into the ground forked stakes and over them they place boughs; they fix in the ground props for the door frames, tie the first sticks and boughs together, then the props of the door frames. Then one by one they place over these bent sticks or saplings and the small boughs. These are then all tied together. Over this framework they put camel mats to hide the interior of the conical tents. If there is no rain about as at present they do not bother surrounding the tents with earth to keep out the water. When the exterior of the tent is finished they cut branches which they place on the floor to sleep on. They call this the 'daragad'.

A Somali family never lives alone in the bush. Several assemble to form a rer or a karia. The first work of the families consists in making two enclosures, a small one for the sheep and goats and a larger one for the camels and cattle. These enclosures are made by cutting down thorn trees which keep out scavengers. When there are no lion about each tent has its own entrance through the zariba, but if lion are near there is only one communal entrance in the zariba. All the inhabitants sleep inside the enclosure, sometimes in the tents and occasionally outside.

Early in the morning the men and yeros take out the stock to graze and have nothing else to do; all the work is done by the women. Walking about the karia, interestedly watching the women perform their various tasks I saw only one or two fighting men who watchfully followed my movements with sullen eyes. I assumed the remainder were out with the camel herds. A small Somali child, standing by its mother, suddenly caught sight of me unexpectedly, burst into tears, fleeing in terror into one of the tents.

Not so the Somali 'gabdos', the unmarried girls. They were far from shy. Born courtesans, these dusky beauties with their bold, almond-shaped eyes and swaying, seductive forms followed us wherever we went. As a general rule they like amourettes with strangers, following the well-known Arab proverb, 'The newcomer filleth the eye'. However, in cases of scandal the women's tribe revenges its honour on the man.

Sauntering back to camp I gave nods of approval and a word of encouragement to the Somalis and Wakamba alike who had done a prodigious job in almost completing the zariba. The weapon pits had been scooped out of the sand on the inside of the zariba; my own little camp was organised with my bed under a convenient acacia in the centre

of things. I cleaned the Manlicher and laid it on the bed. Yusuf produced tea. From him I learned that the Galgail karia-folk were troubled by leopard and regularly lost one or two goats or sheep each week whenever they were encamped in this area.

The three Galgail prisoners, their hands now tied behind their backs, were sitting in the middle of camp.

They had been roped to short stakes driven deep in the ground. A sentry stood near by.

Afternoon was well sped when I walked over to a small hill-crest, climbed into a thorny tree and suffered a good deal of heartburn as the long thorns ripped into my body. Using my binoculars I scanned the country away to the west where we would be travelling in the morning. A couple of miles away a cloud of dust rose over the interminable thorn-scrub, warning us of the approach of the Galgail stock.

Calling the two sergeants over I gave them instructions that from now on each askari would have his rifle with him constantly and that after 6 p.m. I wanted a guard inside the zariba and an additional sentry patrolling outside the perimeter.

I was a little embarrassed to find a bevy of giggling Somali girls in camp inspecting my bed with much interest. Shooing them away, for I had sterner things on mind, I sat down and wrote out a brief sitrep for Indo Adde which I would despatch at first light by an Illalo runner.

The first of the stock burst through the scrub bordering the far side of the clearing. First came the sheep and goats in a bleating rush for the green stagnant water in the deshek from which they drank thirstily. Then came the camels in a long, padding, straggling herd. Hundreds of them. Many of the she camels had their young with them and I saw twins. Tiny, woolly, spindly-legged miniature camels nuzzling mother's udder as she came to a halt for them to suckle. The air was filled with their plaintive bellowing as they entered the Galgail zariba, herded in by the warriors and yeros with their piercing whistles. I counted about forty fighting men for the most part armed with their formidable stabbing spears. Some carried bows and arrows. The arrows, carried in leather quivers, were slung over the shoulders of the bowmen. The arrow tips are poisoned with the 'Wabayo', a virulent poison made by boiling the roots of 'Waba' tree, a round evergreen not unlike a bay tree. This poisonous juice renders any wound incurable and death takes place within an hour. Omar told me that to test the efficacy of the poison a little is inserted into the ear of a sickly sheep or goat, which dies usually in half an hour. All in all, not so formidable, I thought, as in the far country bordering Ethiopia, where, I had

heard, as many as two hundred raiders at a time, the scourge of the Ogaden, the dreaded Shifta, mostly armed with rifles and some automatics would raid down deep into Somali country. In their wake they would leave a trail of utter devastation as they killed and tortured the men, raped and absconded with the women, and—bitterest blow of all to the tribes—looted their camel herds.

It was time for the milking. All the girls and married women gave a hand as the milk flowed in its creamy richness. Omar brought me up another vessel of milk and as I drank slowly my plan of action for first light began to form. We would strike camp and load up our camels for a quick start. I reckoned there would be about five hundred camels in the Galgail herd. I intended to seize half. Our own camp was slightly overlooking the Galgail karia and I would use the Illalos in cutting out two hundred and fifty camels which would immediately be escorted as near Afgoi as possible that day. The Wakamba would cover the seizure and shoot down any resisting Galgail. As soon as the Illalos had got the camels off we would continue our march to Donca Adega with the Wakamba. I scribbled a quick chit for Indo Adde explaining the situation which I would send to him by Somali runner at first light.

We settled down for the night. I slept fitfully and inspected the sentries at 2 a.m. They were alert. At about 4.30 a.m. I was awakened by the frantic bleating of sheep and goats in the Galgail karia. As I called for tea our camp began to stir. The flickering flames from the fires cast leaping shadows in the dark as the lenders began to saddle up the baggage camels. A grunting, sawing roar shattered the stillness of the outside night which set off again the terrified cries from the karia.

'Shabel,' exclaimed Yusuf, bringing tea. The leopard's sawing roars decreased in intensity as with a series of harsh coughs he made off into the night. Our camp fires and movement had evidently deterred him from his intended nocturnal attack on the karia, and the spotted killer went in search of easier, safer prey.

Dressing quickly, I despatched the Illalo runner with a chit for Indo Adde at Afgoi, then gave my instructions to Omar and the two sergeants. A smile of approval appeared on the attentive face of Omar as they listened.

False dawn lit up the night sky as we formed up and quietly marched down to the sleeping karia. We entered, an Illalo pulling away the tangle of thorns protecting the entrance. Two sleepy Galgail sentries were unceremoniously bundled into one of the tents, whilst half of the Illalos, with bayonets fixed, kept guard at the various tent entrances. The others

kicked and prodded the camels to their feet. Dawn broke. Grumbling and complaining the camels lurched to their feet and within a short space of time half of them were outside the karia. Herded by the Illalos they started down the Afgoi road. The Galgail, angry and fully awake, now tried to recover their camels but were penned in the zariba by glittering bayonets. They endeavoured to break out through the thorn fence but a couple of shots from the watchful Wakamba drove them back. The confiscated camels had now disappeared down the road and as my own caravan got under way I withdrew the Wakamba guarding the karia entrance and out poured the Galgail warriors in a torrent of raging fury. A spearman, bolder than the rest, bounded forward coughing out his tribal war-cry, and took Sergeant Mulei's bullet. He dropped his spear, clawed at his chest and sprawlingly sank to the ground.

The Manlicher spoke and a bowman, notching his poisoned arrow, fell over backwards as the bullet went home. Sullenly they broke and dispersed. Some to take refuge in the karia and others after their camels, now a dust-cloud over the scrub, making good time down the road. Staying behind with the rearguard of the Wakamba we made good time along the winding track and only lessened our pace when pursuit seemed unlikely. Leaving Mulei in charge of the rear party I moved ahead past the camels with a Wakamba orderly. Mulei, a look of concern on his normally smiling face after the sharp little action, had insisted on a bodyguard for me. Passing the caravan I saw that each Galgail prisoner had had his hands retied to his front and that each man was tied by a short rope to the tails of the three leading camels.

Omar was jubilant.

'Good, sahib, good,' he kept repeating. He was of the Rahanwein tribe, who, like the Garre, had suffered grievously in the past from the depredations of the truculent, avaricious Galgail. Moving briskly, still keyed up from that brisk little brush with the hostiles we remained alert for a possible counter-attack.

My old friend the sun imperceptibly climbed higher, and as it grew warmer we relaxed a little. Looking at my watch I was surprised to see the hands pointing to half-past nine, and as we had pushed the camels unmercifully I estimated that we had put some eleven miles between us and the Galgail karia.

It was Kayanda, my orderly, who first spotted them. Kayanda, the clown of the platoon who had raised a laugh a little while back by aping the unfortunate Galgail prisoners as willy-nilly they shuffled after the camels. The Wakamba are born mimics and imitators. Kayanda was no

exception. He now pointed far ahead with his rifle. I followed the line of the upward-slanting barrel and saw a cloud of tiny specks, wheeling high in the sky.

'Ndege ya nyama,' he said. Vultures. Vultures never lie. Their presence always means something. The remains of a lion kill, a Somali karia, a wounded animal, or the birth of an animal such as the oryx, kudu or gerenuk as the mother gently licks its newly born, trembly offspring, the while keeping a watchful eye and lowered head on the voracious vultures as they plane down from space and greedily clean up the afterbirth. We covered another mile and I could now distinguish the wheeling vultures and marabou storks. Quite suddenly I smelt it. Death. I remembered it from France. That familiar, sweet, quite unmistakable smell of the dead. Kyanda raised his perspiring face and sniffed. He stopped.

'Watu. Watu, walikufa,' he said, for once in serious mood. Omar came up and looked at me. Calling up Mulei the four of us increased our pace.

A hyena, the waraba, the largest of the hyena family, its unprepossessing, ungainly shape with its blotchy, spotted body and short, round ears, loped across the path ahead of us. Nearer now to that awful unknown. The sweet, sickly stench came stronger. Jackals, cowardly minions of the hyena, several of them, slunk out of our way when suddenly we were clear of the bush and in a large open clearing. A Somali karia with no visible signs of life looked lonely at our approach. Several vultures taxied away and with beating wings lifted themselves into the air. Two more hyenas with loud 'woofs' shambled away.

The stench was now unbearable.

It was then that I saw them. Or what remained of them. Their bloated, broken bodies were scattered around the karia, face upwards on the ground. They had been crucified. Their arms and legs had been spread-eagled, tied and pegged down. I thought that the scavengers, fearing their human smell, had probably left them for the first few days and then as their last agonised movements and tortured screams ceased for ever they had grown bolder and closed in for their unholy feast. A bloodied thigh-bone snapped off its body by one bite from the hyena's powerful jaws lay to my left with the foot pathetically intact.

Horrified, I moved closer. A face here half-eaten away. A full face still left there, bloated out of shape but with the agonised expression still frozen as death mercifully came at last.

They had been castrated and spewed out of the mouths, still recognisable as such, were their testicles.

I paled, felt an overwhelming wave of nausea, and rushed off behind a

convenient ant-hill where I was violently sick. Then, recovering, I returned to that awful place of death.

'Ilah ba Isha Samaiyai mianu arka hain?' (God made the eye, shall he not see?) spat out Omar.

His eyes were bitter.

The caravan approached with the leading camel shying at the death smell. I still had one Illalo with me. I hadn't noticed him nor did I know why he was there when he should have been helping to escort the confiscated camels back to Afgoi.

As he approached I could see his face turn from a bronze colour to grey. Trembling violently he screamed unintelligibly. Foam flecked his lips and his eyes went mad. Throwing away his rifle he drew his knife and rushed the bound Galgail a few paces away, screaming with hate in his violence.

'Sergeant Mulei,' I shouted urgently. The sergeant reacted quickly, bounded forward and thrust his rifle between the Illalo's legs as he sped past, bringing him heavily to the ground. A Wakamba stabbed his boot on his knife hand as the sobbing, fighting Somali was overpowered and held down by a pile of Wakamba.

'Rope. Tie him,' I ordered.

'He Garre, sahib,' explained Omar simply.

'He Garre Giumbulul. This his section.'

'Let's get away from here,' I said urgently to no one in particular. Moving quickly, making a detour, I hastened away and along the path. About a mile from that place of death, Donca Adega, with a breath of breeze stirring away from us, we found another deshek in a smaller clearing. It was quite dry. A little mud remained in the bottom.

Giving orders to off-load and make camp, I then thought out my future actions for the remainder of the safari. First things first, I thought, calling up Sergeant Mulei. I told him to bring up the Galgail prisoners.

Still defiant, they looked contemptuously at me. One smiled. A thin, sneering smile. I burned with anger.

In our kit we carried half a dozen pangas, large chopping knives, which were used to cut down thorn trees for constructing zaribas during our line of march. They would now come in very handy.

'Sergeant Mulei,' I said in Swahili, 'take half your men and get these Galgail to dig a grave and bury the Garre. They are to dig deeply, after that they will cover the grave with stones so that the hyenas and jackals will not be able to get at the remains.

'Neither you nor your men will help. You will load your rifles to see

that they do the work. If they refuse shoot them and bury them all together. Understand?'

'Fahamu,' replied Mulei with a grim smile. He was happy.

Those three blue-blooded, murdering aristocratic dogs of Somalis would work all right—or else.

'Omar, you have heard my words. Tell them to the Galgail.'

He complied.

'Get cracking, sergeant,' I said.

Slipping a round in the breech of his .303 rifle, he held it at high point then reversing it suddenly hit the still-smiling Somali over the face with the butt as he hustled them away.

I told Omar to bring up the Garre Illalo for questioning.

He looked broken and stared glassily at me from defeated, apathetic eyes.

'Tell him I'm sorry for what's happened but I want him to help me contact the Galgail, punish them and recover the looted Garre stock.'

He brightened up at this and began to take an interest in life again.

'How big was the Garre karia?'

'He say 'bout five hundred camels, sahib, he himself owned fifty of them which were herded by his two brothers. They were both kill by Galgails.'

'How many fighting men had the Garre. How many women and children?'

'He say 'bout twenty spearmens, sahib, 'bout fifteen womens, some old mens and the yeros.'

'Where does he think they have gone?'

'Not sure, sahib, but he think Bulo Garas, 'bout forty-five miles from here where there is water and big, very big Garre karia. Too big for Galgails to attack.'

'Where does he think the Galgail fighting men have gone with the looted Garre stock?'

'Not sure, sahib, but p'raps crossed road into Galgails country.'

'H'm. What do you yourself think, Omar? I want your advice and help. I want the griff.'

We had been in a fight together, had looked at death and were now mutually confident of each other. Comrades in arms.

Omar sucked his teeth and looked thoughtful.

'P'raps best go Bulo Garas and get griff there.' (Here I smiled unconsciously.) 'Also water there.'

At the mention of water I started guiltily. Once leaving Afgoi events

had moved so rapidly that I'd completely forgotten to check up on this most important item.

'How much water have we got left?' I asked quickly.

'Not know, sahib. Will go and count,' he replied, striding off.

He came back quickly, concern showing itself on his face.

'Bad, sahib, bad, only half barrimil left. 'Nuff for tea tonight, then finish.'

I cursed savagely. I had only myself to blame. What a clot, I thought. Here we are right out in the middle of the Shag with little or no water.

Walking over to the barrimils I kicked them in a panic. All empty but one, and that sounded only half-full as I rocked it from side to side. Calling up a Wakamba I made him carry it and have it placed under my bed, giving instructions to the sentry that it was not to be touched.

'Where is the nearest water from here, Omar?' I asked apprehensively.

'Bulo Garas, sahib—'bout forty-five miles away. River'—here he pointed away to the east, to Galgail country—' 'bout sixty miles away.'

It would be dusk before the gruesome job of digging a communal grave and burying the Garre was finished for they had to build a cairn of stones over it to discourage the scavengers from getting at the bodies, and these would require fetching and carrying.

Well, I thought, there's nothing for it. We'd push off to Bulo Garas at first light, getting the griff from the Garre there. They would be only too keen to help in contacting the Galgail and in so doing recover their stock.

It was now late afternoon. Calling up Omar and my orderly, Kayanda, we followed the track back to see how the burial party was progressing.

They had almost finished. The three Galgail looked much the worse for wear after their several hours' work—probably the first manual work they had ever done. Gone were their maridadi porcupine hair quills and gone was their arrogance. Sergeant Mulei had done a good job, I thought.

In order to finish the cairn before dusk I called on the Wakamba to help and gave a hand myself in piling the flat, grey slabs of stone high on the grave. In spite of the violence of their end they had at least found a decent resting-place, which is more than can be said for some of the Somalis in the bush. It is customary with them when on trek to leave any old people behind who are unable to keep up with the moving caravans for the hyenas to finish.

However, a person subjected to a violent death traditionally should be buried before sundown, and I hoped that these Garre warriors, in spite of being so cruelly treated, would find unlimited houris in the hereafter.

We piled the last few stones on the lonely graves, then made our way back to camp.

The sun had set; already the scavengers were giving call.

I had Sergeant Mulei fall in the Wakamba and told him to keep an eye on the Garre Illalo who I had released. He had now quietened down, but his hate-filled eyes still strayed menacingly to the bound Galgail prisoners.

Examining each man's water-bottle I found that they were all empty. Filling each bottle from the remaining barrimil left it empty.

It served little use in lecturing them but I did so, pointing out that their irresponsibility in squandering the water had put us all in a most dangerous position. Like children they lived for the day. The Serikali (the Government) would provide. Were they not wearing the King's uniform? Were they not receiving their pay, their rations every month and their uniforms half-yearly? Their steel-brains ticked over slowly. They hated to think, for thinking required concentration and they had none. I could see them trying to think now, wide-eyed and solemn-faced as they wondered why their effendi, their officer, was scolding them all over a little water. In their own country, lush with banana trees and millet, the rivers flowed past their huts. Their women drew the water and brought it to them where they brewed their 'pombe' or millet beer. Here they drank their fill, smoking, yarning and idling. No, this concentration of thought was too much and so they gave up and chorused their 'Ndio, effendis' after my little lecture.

There they stood, awaiting my dismissal. Eat, drink, the occasional whore and the askari is happy. If he over-ate, when those black bellies would swell out like forty-four-gallon petrol drums, the platoon dresser would give them some white powdered dawa, the white man's magic, and their stomach aches would go. If they over-drank, mostly pombe, or much worse, Nubian gin, which was sold illicitly in Afgoi village, they would suffer imperial hangovers when the steel clock that was their brain would run down and cease to tick for a day. If they had a whore and contracted pox that was the biggest joke in history. The kindly, benevolent Serikali would send them to hospital in Mogadishu, where they would lie between clean white sheets and have the little, healing needle jabbed twice a day in their backsides until they were better. True their pay was stopped in hospital, but for those few ecstatic, vigorous seconds of lusty passion it was well worth it. Happy, likeable, steel-brained savages.

I dismissed them wearily.

Calling over Yusuf I asked him if there was any water left over in the kettle for tea.

'Bio damai, Water finish,' he said happily. They were all the same, I thought. They love being the bearer of bad news. They seem to take a fiendish delight in watching the sahib's reactions to the news that this is finished or that is finished when one is miles in the blue and it is quite impossible to obtain further supplies.

'Open up a tin of fruit for dinner,' I told him.

I could scoff the fruit and drink the juice.

'Gone, finish, you eat, sahib,' he replied, happier still and proud of his few words of English.

'Damn you, Yusuf,' I snapped crossly. 'Open a tin of flippin' peas then.'

'Can do, sahib,' replied the imperturbable Somali Jeeves.

I ate the cold peas moodily, forkful by forkful as I speared them from the tin. Drinking the green juice thirstily I threw away the empty tin. A starling, resplendent in his glittering red and blue jacket, with inquisitive beady eyes, alighted from a near-by acacia, walked over to the tin and ate the few morsels I had left.

It was night again.

The hyenas started up and went through their whole repertoire. They shrieked, howled, cackled and laughed in a frenzy of mad orchestration at being cheated out of the human remains they had previously dined off.

I slept miserably and fitfully with my thirst unassuaged. My sub-conscious anxiety over water caused me to dream vividly of pints upon pints of cold beer. Delicious, ice-cold beer. Each pint in a frosted pewter tankard.

I awoke with a dry mouth and after some difficulty opened my eyelids which had stuck together, I had a feeling that something was near and on becoming conscious smelt a foul breath close to my head. With a scuffling sound accompanied by a loud 'woof' a hyena rushed off and smashed his way through the zariba. Getting up, I spoke to the sleepy sentry, giving him a rocket for not being alert. Sleeping fitfully until five a.m. I awoke the camp, giving orders to saddle up the camels.

Omar repeated my order in Somali to the still-sleeping lenders. The usual drill followed with little enthusiasm as though all realised the plight we were in and the waterless miles which still lay ahead of us. We left without the usual refreshing, energy-giving tea.

Another inevitable day dawned and the sun, friendly no longer, rose and climbed inexorably. I was too miserable to take notice of the game as I fought back the temptation to uncork my water-bottle and drink, for I had given orders that the Wakamba were not to touch their bottles until we halted.

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On we marched until eleven, through that parched and cruel bush, along the winding, monotonous, never-ending track.

It was too much of an effort now to raise my arm to brush aside the clutching thorn branches. Staggering through them doggedly they gashed my face and tore into my clothes. I now panted with the heat and that awful raging thirst.

Mulei came up and raspingly begged me to halt. His face was a perspiring black mask, his uniform stained black with his sweat. He forgot to salute.

'Bado nusu saa.' I croaked. In half an hour's time. I wiped the sweat out of my eyes and went forward again, looking with a longing ache at an inviting low, shady acacia by the side of the track.

We must cover the miles, cover the miles, cover the miles, I kept repeating to myself. A hornbill gave his harsh, mocking cry as he dipped overhead.

The sun flared down hellishly, until my eyeballs grew hot in their sockets. Heat-waves shimmered and danced relentlessly to my front. My mouth was long since dry of spittle. I wanted to vomit, but couldn't. Trying to screw up my eyelids I blundered into a thorn again and blood mingled with the sweat on my face.

'Sahib,' Omar rasped out behind me. I listlessly turned and looked at him dully.

'Dombir,' he croaked, pointing to a tuber partly exposed in the hot, red sand. Already the Garre Illalo had his knife out and was digging it up, frantic in his eagerness. Omar joined him. They drove their knives deep in the sand as the long, putty-coloured root became exposed. They slashed pieces off, ate and spat out flakes of root.

Omar offered me a piece, urging me to eat. Biting into it thirstily I found it had a bitter taste but it contained moisture, wonderful, life-giving moisture.

Gesturing to Mulei to off-load, I slumped under the nearest acacia, unmindful of the fallen thorns. Snatching at my bottle I drew out the cork, letting the water trickle, drop by precious drop, down my parched throat.

Licking the cork I replaced it firmly and shoved the bottle upright in the sand as I stretched out. The sun's fiery rays penetrated the thorn affording little shade as I squirmed still further under the tree. Taking off my boots I sighed with relief. I was too tired to brush off the ants which persistently crawled over me.

At length, recovering somewhat, I called Mulei over and gave him

instructions to get the Wakamba collecting as many tubers as they could, putting them in empty ration sacks to load when we moved off.

I tried to doze but the reeling heat of the sun and the ants would not let me. The Garre Illalo brought over a camel mat, and flung it over the umbrella-shaped tree as I panted gratefully in the extra shade it afforded.

With an agonising motion the sun passed its zenith to begin its slow fall from the sky as though begrudging its power over the parched land it held in thraldom below.

I sat up with an effort, rearranging the camel mat on the acacia above me so that the small square of shadow fully covered my resting-place. The askaris were lying here and there, each man under his own stunted little thorn. Even the camels were sitting down, tired, for this was their fourth day without water. I thought we had covered about twenty miles so far, which left twenty-five before we reached Bulo Garas and water. It was essential that we covered another ten miles at least today for we couldn't take another full day tomorrow without water. I began to worry again over water. What would we do if the deshek at Bulo Garas had dried out? That would mean there would be no Garre karia there, no life-giving milk from the she camels. I again reproached myself bitterly. What a God-forsaken, desolate place the desert was. No place for weaklings. I began to see how the Somali had retained his virility over the centuries. The survival of the fittest. The old people who couldn't keep up with the caravans left behind for the hyenas to pull down and finish off. They died the hard way. An inadequately protected karia attacked by a stronger force of feuding Somalis. They too died the hard way, by spear, arrow and knife.

Slowly, conserving my energy, I pulled on my socks and boots, giving the order to saddle up.

I ambled over to where my chop-box lay, still with the thirst upon me. Six tins of bully-beef—no future there for the salted beef would only increase that awful craving. Four tins of milk—— Puncturing one with my knife, I drank the warm contents greedily sucking it up through the small hole in the tin and lovingly rolling it round my tongue, savouring its refreshing goodness.

It took much longer to load up the camels as the askaris and lenders worked lethargically. We were off by three o'clock as I dragged myself reluctantly from the shade of the friendly little acacia. Left-right, left-right, left-right. Back came the torture. My shorts and shirt chafed as the sweat again broke out, seeping in little rivulets down my body. The Manlicher, weighing about seven pounds, now seemed to weigh fifty—a

long piece of iron piping, hot to the touch as the sling cut into my shoulder, first the left and then the right as I continually changed its position.

I tried chewing the yellowish-red berries from the 'Mara' tree—Omar and the Illalos had been chewing them for some time—but I found them bitter and vomited up their viscous juice.

It required an effort of will not to call halt every time I passed under a large acacia overhanging the track whose shadow beckoned friendlily and afforded a fleeting second's respite from the sun as I passed underneath.

We left the weary miles behind—but slowly now. A pitiful slowness, for the camels were tired and thirsty and could not do more than the maximum of two to two and a half miles an hour.

O blessed relief as the sun, low and less fierce in the sky, lost its heat and a small breeze sprang up; a zephyr which gently played on our faces, cooling the heat within us.

On and on. We were now moving like automatons, mechanical, perspiring machines. My legs felt rubbery whilst my boots seemed to sink deeper with each step I took into that cursed sand.

'Walk him off his feet,' said the Colonel. 'Endure the hardships he does.'

Walk him off his feet, mocked the Go Away bird.

Hardships, hardships, hardships. Walk, walk, walk, walk.

Walk him off his feet, feet, feet, feet.

Shaaaaaaged, shaaaaaaaaged, shaaaaaaaged, echoed the hornbill.

The sun sank fiery red over the horizon in a blaze of defiance and I sobbed my relief as the air grew cooler.

The unending nightmare continued. I half-stumbled and recovered. There was nothing to be seen but the dense thorn-scrub on either side of the camel track winding and twisting ahead of us. I was now dream-walking as in a coma in the fading sunset, devoid of all thought, with that constantly raging thirst still upon me.

It grew dark. The stars came out and nightjars like huge moths flitted silently across our path. My watch said it was seven p.m. and I realised we had just about completed the remaining ten miles for the day.

The bush then thinned a little. Wearily and so thankfully I called halt, then lay down, pillowing my head on the near-empty water-bottle.

The Wakamba fell in their tracks and scrambling to my feet I got Sergeant Mulei to post a sentry, then exhorting the others to one last effort we built a zariba, slashing away at the sullen thorns with panga and knife.

I drank the remainder of my water, gasping with pleasure as it trickled

down my parched throat. Stumbling to my bed I slept as one already dead.

Dawn came and slowly we mechanically saddled up, kicking the camels to their feet as they protestingly roared their complaints. There was no cheerfulness in camp now and no singing. Two of the Wakamba were limping with large open sores on their feet.

We staggered on. Bulo Garas must be reached before the sun began to burn down again or we would surely die. A hyena wailed his way through the bush and was answered by the long-drawn-out hunting cry of another. I shuddered, frightened now, and started to walk in a panic.

Outstripping the others I then heard Omar calling hoarsely, 'Sahib, sahib.'

The caravan had stopped.

Stumbling back I saw that one of the Wakamba was on the ground groaning incoherently. He seemed older than the others for his tarbush had fallen off showing the curly wool of his hair sprinkled with grey. He was far gone.

'Funga huyu juu ya ngamia,' I panted. A camel was brought to his knees at the lender's rasped-out word of command. Somehow we hoisted up the Wakamba, lashing him on with rope, then on again as the caravan lurched forward.

One hour, two hours, three hours, three and a half hours, the sun rising higher and ever hotter with the treacherously hot hours sapping my strength until I wanted to fall down and rest and to hell with the hyenas. I felt that madness was near. Then came the miracle: we were clear of that dense, lonely bush and saw the vultures ahead, wheeling high in the sky above a large karia in the middle of an open plain.

I could now make out a clump of dom palms near a deshek with a herd of sheep and goats near the edge. We ran forward, askaris and camels, in a stumbling group of men and animals. Dropping our rifles we threw ourselves in. Filthy, green, slimy water covered by the dung from thousands of camels, cattle and sheep and goats, but . . . water. I lay on my back wallowing in the filth of it, filling my mouth as my head rolled from side to side.

Our relief was infectious.

'Sahib, sahib,' laughed Omar, 'Anah Gel'. I squelched my way out of that wonderful slime and with trembling hands grasped the tebed of camel's milk offered to me by a smiling Somali girl. Burying my face in it I drank deeply. It was smoky but so good.

'Garre, sahib, Garre,' smiled Omar happily.

The Wakamba laughed and joked as two of them dragged their half-unconscious comrade to the water's edge where he drank, lying on his belly and sucking up the water eagerly.

We were soon surrounded by the Garre warriors left behind to guard the karia, the old men, the women, the girls and the yeros, all wildly excited and conversing with Omar in their guttural tongue. Calling over Sergeant Mulei I ordered him to keep a watchful eye on the Galgail prisoners.

Many willing helpers soon had our camp finished near to the Garre karia, then I collapsed on my bed, sleeping until late in the afternoon.

I surfaced and held a baraza with the Garre; from them I ascertained that the survivors had made their way from Donca Adega and were now all safe at Bulo Garas. The clan had lost all their stock to the Galgail raiding party who had made their way across the road and had now rejoined their own sections in Galgail country. The three prisoners had been identified as part of the raiding party. I promised that Indo Adde would bring them to justice as soon as we returned to Afgoi. I also promised to return to them their looted stock. At this last promise all the fighting men, some eighty of them, rushed forward with their spears. I would have no lack of volunteers for the job in hand.

The following day we rested, then moved on to Galgail country—to the east. My force now consisted of the Wakamba sections plus twenty Garre spearmen and twenty bowmen.

Having fully recovered from our ordeal we moved off, refreshed and in high spirits, making good time across country as we hit the Afgoi road about midday. Here we had our customary midday halt, leaving camp soon after three where we halted for the night at a place called Bille Tobani, which consisted of the usual clearing in the bush and a few deserted Galgail karias.

I asked Omar to question the Garre as to the proximity of the Galgail karias and their stock. He informed me that the bulk of them were not more than eight miles away at the most. Before turning-in for the night I briefly outlined my plans, putting them in the picture for the seizure of the Galgail stock in the morning.

Immediately on making contact I would split my fifty-odd men into three parties. Party No. 1 under Sergeant Mulei would do a pincer movement to the left of the grazing stock with five Wakamba riflemen supported by ten spearmen and ten bowmen—the Garre levies. Party No. 2 under the Garre Illalo would consist of an equal number of Wakamba riflemen supported by an equal number of Garre levies armed

as in Party No. 1. The second party would do a pincer movement to the right, both parties to seize as many camels as they could handle and to rendezvous at headquarters when we would immediately move off in the direction of Afgoi.

Neither party was to fire or attack the Galgail unless they started hostilities. I thought by splitting up my riflemen between the two parties would deter the Galgail from closing so avoiding bloodshed.

Moving off before first light we contacted the Galgail stock at about half-past six and immediately both parties fanned out to the left and to the right of them, penetrating deep to their rear so as to seize the bulk of the stock. I brought our baggage camels to a halt, making a temporary camp, and awaited anxious moments when I heard rifle fire in the far distance.

Just after eight a great cloud of dust heralded the approach of the sergeant's party with a straggling herd of camels, about three hundred of them I thought, making a rough estimate as they streamed into camp. As I thought, the Galgail herdsmen had tried to close but had been driven off by the Wakamba riflemen. They had suffered no casualties and I congratulated him. He smiled his pleasure.

An anxious hour passed, then came the second party, whistling and yelling as they herded in scores upon scores of camels—there must have been at least five hundred I estimated. The Garre Illalo came up and reported, almost incoherent with delight at the serious blow we had dealt the Galgail. Most of the stock he had recovered were Garre camels from Donca Adega.

We set off in the direction of the road with a strong rearguard. The noise from the camels was indescribable but it was sweet music in my ears and sweeter still in the ears of the Garre. They had forgotten the massacre at Donca Adega. Here they were with the thing they worshipped most in life—camels. Hundreds upon hundreds of them, they had most of their own back and the balance belonged to their hated, traditional enemies. They were jubilant. In a frenzy of delight a warrior would suddenly leap high in the air, spinning as he came down brandishing his spear and screaming out his tribal war cry.

Milk was there for the asking from the she camels and we drank our fill from the tebeds as we moved. By midday we had herded them on to the road where we made better time. The air was choked with dust churned up by their countless pads and it took me just under the half-hour to weave my way through them until I reached the leaders away out in front.

Here I pressed on with Omar and Kananda my orderly to reconnoitre a suitable camp site for the evening. Omar assured me that there was an

open plain hidden by thorn-scrub just off the road about a mile ahead. At length we reached it, a wide plateau about a mile across. We would build a zariba in the middle so that any attacking Galgail would have to cross open country to press home their attack. The camels arrived and then began the Herculean task of building the zariba, which we finished about tea-time.

I gave orders for a camel to be killed and roasted, later sharing its succulent, sweet meat with the men.

Night came swiftly. Posting double sentries I slept, happy in the thought that my task was almost successfully completed.

At about midnight I was awakened by a strange noise I could not identify which turned out to be two camels making love.

Evidently one of the baggage camels considered he had been celibate long enough and had straddled the she camel who had been sitting on the ground a few yards from my bed. He was performing a rocking motion, blowing out his neck and making the most terrible love calls. He looked so ludicrous that I burst out laughing in spite of being so rudely awakened.

I left the two strange lovers to it and tried to sleep again.

Dozing off, I felt a hand on my shoulder and muttered an impatient curse. It was a Garre sentry. 'Libah, sahib, libah,' he whispered urgently.

Fully awake now, I heard a succession of grunts coming deep out of the lion's belly as he softly padded outside the zariba. My bed was not placed in the middle of the zariba but away to one side of the thorns, Yusuf no doubt thinking it a good thing to keep me as far away as possible from the massed herd of camels sharing camp.

The lion coughed again, menacingly. The camels milled in fright. I reached for the Manlicher, slipping off the safety-catch.

Omar, feeling much more secure from the centre of the zariba, called out in typical Somali bravado, 'Oh, lion, splendid lion, where art thou? A feast, a feast of eight hundred camels awaits thy greatness.'

This brought a laugh from the awakening askaris, but these died away when the lion, hungry and determined on meat, coughed again, the coughs reaching a frightening intensity as he tried to panic the camels into breaking out of the zariba. The coughs culminated in an ear-shattering, utterly terrifying roar as he uncoiled his muscled springs and leapt over the thorn fence and in amongst us.

I had half-expected an attack on the zariba by the Galgail in an effort to recover their stock and this I was prepared for, but the unknown quantity to me of the lion and his totally unexpected attack in all its ferocity paralysed me with fright as I saw a blur of death curving over the zariba.

The flickering flames from the fires outlined his shape in those few terrifying seconds. The magnificent head, the outstretched, death-dealing forepaws, that splendidly-muscled body as he stood there for a moment, sure of his power. He was a picture of rage, muscles tense and ready for action.

Suddenly his tail stiffened, then with blazing amber eyes he leapt for the kill on a terrified she camel. A quick blow from his forepaw broke her neck and he then buried his fangs in her throat.

I fired and as he half-turned for a second charge a Garre warrior rushed forward burying his spear deep in his side. He roared in a paroxysm of pain and rage, standing on his hind legs and biting savagely at the haft of the spear. He then took a second spear in his chest as I fired again for the throat. He sounded his death cry, a long-drawn-out moan, and died.

I walked up to him and gazed my fill, for he was magnificent. I felt no regret for the circumstances of his death, which had a glamour all their own. My very first lion.

Drawing out the two spears which were embedded in his chest I handed them back to the Garre, shaking hands with him as we had both been in at the kill. Had it not been for his timely intervention I doubt whether the little Manlicher would have stopped his full-blooded charge. Telling Yusuf to make coffee I watched two Illalos skin and disrobe His Majesty. I slowly sipped my coffee, then fell asleep utterly content and happy.

I was awakened by the hum of a truck at sun-up as Indo Adde pulled into camp in a red cloud of dust. He was enthusiastic over the way the safari had gone. I called for a couple of tebeds of camel's milk and as we drank told him of the details of the safari. He congratulated me on the lion, telling me that the Somali lion is reckoned a small race but this would measure out at about ten feet. Added to this was his black mane which was unusual in a desert lion. Would I accompany him back to Afgoi in the truck? I briefly considered his offer and then declined as I thought it better to finish the safari on foot with my Wakamba. I asked him to take two of the Wakamba in with him, one suffering from malaria and the other from a poisoned foot; also the three Galgail prisoners whom I was glad to get rid of. Indo Adde confirmed that Afgoi was only twenty miles away and promised me the biggest drink in history with a hot bath on my arrival. As he was leaving, Yusuf came up and asked if he could take five baby camels, three evidently having been born during the night and two early that morning. It was a few minutes' work to collect sufficient dried grass to line the bottom of the truck, lift them in and bed them down. Then the three Galgail prisoners with the two sick Wakamba escort to keep an eye on them. Waving good-bye to Indo

Adde as he noisily let in the clutch I gave the order to saddle up; so the final trek home to Afgoi began. First the baggage animals, then the long, straggling herd of camels, eight hundred of them, stretching for about a mile. They choked the road with their numbers as they were urged on by the whistles and cries from the Illalos and Garre tribesmen.

It was a tired but happy caravan which finally reached Afgoi that evening. Indo Adde had prepared a large zariba near the village and as the thirsty camels rushed into the Uebe Scebelli to drink their fill they were herded and counted into the zariba by his Illalos, each camel's belly now distended by about twenty-four gallons of water. True to his word Indo Adde called for beer as I reached his house, refreshed and in clean clothes. Burying my face in the pint tankard he placed at my elbow I drank deeply, then drank again, for I seemed dehydrated. After my sixth bottle I sighed and Indo Adde laughingly asked, 'Washed all the sand out of your throat?'

'M'mm, Ray,' I replied lazily, 'I never knew beer could taste so good.'

'I'm glad you've dropped the "sir" at long last,' he said amusedly. 'You've had a damned hard safari with excellent results. The count has just been handed to me. Of the eight hundred camels you seized five hundred were looted from the Garre karia at Donca Adega, which left three hundred with the Galgail brand plus the two hundred and fifty you seized at the first Galgail karia. In all, five hundred and fifty Galgail camels. I'll hold a baraza tomorrow. The five hundred Garre camels will be handed back to them and the five hundred and fifty Galgail camels will be confiscated as a communal fine for their attack on the Garre. I have given Haji Mohamed Elmi, Chief of the Galgail, ten days in which to find a further 1,100 camels as dia for the eleven Garre his warriors killed. Before we came the Italians never really enforced the payment of blood money and the Galgail had things their own way for a long time.'

' "Kill," Haji Mohamed told his warriors.

' "Kill and loot, for who will enforce the payment of dia? The Garre? They're too weak. The Serikali? Bah! the Residente never leaves Afgoi—he doesn't seek trouble." '

'Well, Haji Mohamed has been badly shaken. He is going frantic and is sending out runners to all his clans. Stop the killing he is saying. Not only is the Inglesi District Commissioner enforcing the payment of dia but we also have to pay an additional fifty camels for every cursed Garre killed. He has lost face and after this he will not be the power in the land he once was.

'Yes, between us we will have stopped the Garre-Galgail feud, tem-

porarily at least. This calls for another drink. Try some of this rum. It is made locally at Villaggio from sugar cane and carries a real wallop.'

It certainly did. After a bottle I was quite screwed—not screechers but almost so as I tipsily stood up, said my good nights and weaved my way home.

I slept-in the following morning, for a combination of Indo Adde's rum and safari had left me shagged. I had given the Wakamba who had accompanied me on safari the following day off, so I didn't feel too guilty as I surfaced at midday.

The tea Yusuf had placed by my bedside was cold, with two dead flies and a mosquito floating in the yellowish scum. I looked at it and shuddered. Thrusting aside the mosquito net I stood up and vertigo hit me. Little red men with long tails and big picks hammered away at my brain. Villaggio rum. I shuddered again and felt a wave of nausea. I tottered off to the bathroom and was sick. After a cold shower and a couple of Alka Seltzers I felt a little more human. Slipping on my Somali sandals and a clean pair of starched shorts I opened the veranda door, blinking in the bright sunlight.

'Jambo, effendi,' said Sergeant Mulei. He must have been there for some time. He wasn't looking his usual cheery self for there was a solemn look on his normally happy face. Probably been on the wompo too, I thought.

'Habari gani?' I greeted him.

'Mbaya sana, effendi. Number 1477 Kayanda Toto amequisha kufa shauri ya pombe. Yeye kunya sana sana sana ya Nubian gini. Basi. Yeye amekufa tu.' He rolled his eyes.

I looked at the sergeant stupidly. What the hell was he talking about? Kayanda Toto, the clown of the platoon, had just come off safari with us. How could he now be dead through drinking a surfeit of Nubian gin?

I blinked and said, 'Sema tena, na sema pole pole.'

The sergeant repeated his story, enunciating slowly as though speaking to a child. Bugger my old boots, I thought, it's true then.

My brain started to tick again. Calling Yusuf to give the sergeant tea I put on my tunic slowly, giving me time to collect my scattered wits, then we made for the hospital together.

Number 1477 Kayanda Toto was dead all right. He would never again clown on safari and raise a laugh. His face was grey and cold to the touch. The sad-eyed Somali dresser who had seen so much death in this harsh country told me that he had died an hour ago in spite of a pump being used on his stomach. It was then that I noticed Merefu, another Wakamba,

in the next bed. His eyes were yellow and tinged with red. He raised a feeble 'Jambo, effendi', accompanied by a stupid grin. He was still drunk. The little whitewashed room reeked of gin. Nubian gin—almost pure methylated spirit. I was livid that I should have lost so good an askari in such a manner. The distilling and sale of Nubian gin was strictly illegal throughout the territory and I resolved to find the seller of this gut-rot, charging him in Indo Adde's Court.

Curtly I asked Sergeant Mulei to question the drunken Merefu where he had been drinking last night. Merefu screwed up his eyes concentrating on the question, but the steel clock of his brain refused to tick. The effort was too much and he gave up the struggle, replying 'Sijui' (I don't know).

'Don't sijui me you drunken biscuit,' I roared, conveniently forgetting my own excesses of last night and subsequent hangover.

'Kayanda Toto amequisha kufa shauri ya pombe. Tazama yeye.'

Merefu with difficulty sat up in bed and looked at the dead Kayanda. He focused his eyes with difficulty, first the right and then the left.

'It is God's affair,' he said.

Disregarding King's Regulations I leant over the bed and hit him hard on the face with my open hand. It sobered him.

'It is not God's affair if he dies of drink. Where did he get it from?' I roared. His lack-lustre eyes took on a momentary gleam of intelligence. I could hear his brain ticking.

'Duka ya Negash,' he muttered. I was now getting somewhere. Negash Meshashia, of Ethiopian-Eritrean extraction, was Indo Adde's typewriter-cum-book-keeper, also the owner of a dubious drinking den in Afgoi village. After getting an assurance from the Somali dresser that Merefu would recover from the effects of the Nubian gin the sergeant and myself hurried to the village and entered Negash's duka. Half a dozen prostitutes were in the shop coyly drinking orangeades. Negash himself, showing a mouthful of gold teeth, smiled his false welcome.

I questioned him. Had two of my Wakamba askaris been drinking there last night? An emphatic No. Did he sell Nubian gin? Certainly not, for was the sale not prohibited by the Honourable British Government? In the meantime Sergeant Mulei, who had quietly slipped behind the counter in Negash's living quarters, returned carrying an armful of bottles. I opened one and smelt it. Nubian gin.

Negash protested that it was solely for his own use and not for sale. Telling the sergeant to call a couple of Wakamba who were loitering outside off-duty I told Negash that he was under arrest and formally charged him with illicitly selling prohibited liquor thereby causing the

death of Number 1477 Kayanda Toto. The offence carried a penalty of a fine of up to one thousand shillings with or without six months' imprisonment.

I opened the till and seized his takings, which I counted in front of him. Six hundred shillings. Hustling the protesting Negash out of his empty shop, for the whores at the first sign of trouble had quickly slipped away, I took him to the office, placed him in clink and locked up the six hundred shillings in my office safe.

'Highly irregular,' expostulated Indo Adde as I later recounted the story to him. 'Dammit, you haven't proven anything against Negash yet. You just can't barge into a man's shop and rifle his till. You'll look an awful clot if the case is chucked out.'

'It will be proven,' I replied grimly, for apart from the askari Merefu I had found another three askaris who had been in the drinking party and their evidence would prove Negash's guilt conclusively.

So it proved two days later when he was found guilty, fined six hundred shillings and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. He wrote a letter addressed to the Governor, the Senior Political Officer, Afgoi, and copies to myself. It was, I thought, quite amusing:

Mogadishu,
15th October, 1941

To The Governor, Mogadishu.
To The Senior Political Officer, Mogadishu.
To The Political Officer, Afgoi.
Copies to Tenente Collins, Gendarmerie Officer, Afgoi.

Honourable Governor,

I the undersigned Ethiopic-Eritrean Lig Negash Meshashia have the honour to respectfull inform you of what follows:

On the 7th October, 1941, the Gendarmerie Officer Tenente Collins came to my house, bashed the till and seized a bag containing 700 Shs, and, after a short enquire they ordered to arrest me.

The examination was about a certain Askari Wakamba who had been found completely drunk in the square of Afgoi and subsequently died from such drink. Before he dead the Wakamba was in such condition having taken some drinks in the Shops of Afgoi which are three, viz:— Michele Patzimas, Greec, Whore Muddei, Somali, and my own. In Afgoi there are beside these other clandestine sellers of liquor, who work on account of the said Whore. Such sellers are the prostitutes, Batula, Habiba and another Whore.

I did not know that an Wakamba Askari had become so drunk but the other sellers and the aforesaid women knew it and supposing they would have been searched by the Authorities they hid all the alcholic drinks they had. So it happened that during the searching done by a British Officer in my house (Oh, what shame) the Officer found out a little quantity of liquor destined to my own use, some tegg (abyssin drink) some bitter soda and Orangeades. Of these three drinks the sale is allowed as they don't contain any alcohol and I paid the due duty until the 31 December 1941 for the sale of such articles.

Of course in other shops and prostitutes house any thing was found and consequently I was deemed to be responsible the Askari so drunk and later very dead?

I always say the truth as I received a good breeding either in my Father's house (Balambaras Meshishia Degiac Negusse) and in my Uncle's one (Ras Chidanemarian di Arresa (Eritrea) and therefore I state, just as I stated before the Political Officer of Afgoi, of having given, on the Sunday night the 5 October 1941, to some Wakamba Askari some little glass of liquor together with many Orangeades, Bitter soda and tegg but I assure you that anybody left my shop being drunk. One supposes that the Askari has drunk as usual in the houses of the said prostitutes where beside to drink, the customers find other pleasures and therefore they prefer such establishments more than my shop where there is no women to offer.

As things are, I, very faithful servant of the British Government since you come to this land, living from the February to April in Bur Acaba, and now acting as Typewriter-Book-keeper at the Residence of Afgoi beg you to forgive this first offence.

I add that during the searching were seized six hundred shillings which are the fruit of twenty years working, and I assure you that I never had to deal with the Judicary Authority or with the Police. I am the Father of a numerous family and six months of imprisonment are a very serious spot for his honour and will cause misery for his family.

Of my good conduct may give evidence all the Somali subjects, Arab, Eritrean and Ethipoic ones whom I know as well as the Italians.

Trusting you will take into consideration my heartfelt application.

I am,

Your Honour,

CAV. Lig. Negash Mesheshia.

A few months passed and now it was the Haggai, the summer season, both Indo Adde and myself had been invited to attend the 'Festa-della-

Bastonate' so called by the Italians before the occupation. The two local tribes, the Uadan and the Geledi, riverines and not true Somalis, took part in this yearly event just prior to the harvesting for they were mainly agriculturists. The contest was to take place at Afgoi itself on the banks of the Leopard River. From our vantage point overlooking a shallow ford we could see on the north bank the warriors of the Uaden and facing them on the south bank the fighting men of the Geledi. They were armed with sticks and throwing clubs, for in this mock battle spears, knives, bows and arrows were not allowed. Even so, hardly a year went by without one or two fatal casualties to the contestants. They were now being urged on to combat by the serried ranks of their womenfolk behind them. To the women's ululations and shrill cries the two tribes met with a crash in the shallow ford. There were about one hundred warriors on each side and as they swayed backwards and forwards the fight developed into a series of single combats. The encircling warriors would let fly with their throwing sticks, usually receiving their opponents' on their shields, closing with their clubs, feinting, parrying then striking home as a warrior would beat through his opponent's guard. The air was filled with their guttural, coughing war cries and the screaming of Ah! Ah! by the women provoking the fighting as two warriors would clash together followed by the fighting men shouting Ah! Ah! i dil (You cannot beat me) as they strove for mastery.

Away to one side stood a group of chiefs and elders together with half a dozen tribal police who would intervene should the fighting get out of hand.

At length, sullenly and imperceptibly the Geledi gave way. About a dozen of their number were sitting or lying down with broken heads, then came the break through as a group of screaming Uadan warriors were through their defences and after the prize of the victors, the women. They resisted by biting, scratching and throwing camel dung at their attackers. Here and there behind the broken Geledi lines were couples on the ground as the victorious Uadan warriors, fargone in lustful passion attempted to seduce the struggling girl of his choice.

This gave the Geledi a breathing space and a chance to make up lost ground, with about a quarter of their foe struggling and lusting after their women.

Headed by a tall, fierce-looking warrior, his bushy head of hair frizzed out by porcupine quills, they bounded down for the counter-attack, clubbing and kicking the Uadan off their women. At a disadvantage the Uadan withdrew discomfited to their own side of the river and so the

fight continued, first the Geledi giving way and then the Uadan until both sides were exhausted and any bad blood between individuals and the tribes had been shed with honour satisfied. The chiefs of the two tribes then gave the order to cease fighting.

'Well,' smiled Indo Adde, 'what do you think of the Festa-della-Bastonate?'

'Wonderful,' I gulped, the blood stirring in my veins at the furious and licentious scenes we had just witnessed.

'H'm, you must see the real climax to the fight tonight when they dance the festival "Hes" or dance of the Leopard River. Come round to my place and we'll crack another bottle of rum to get in the mood for it.'

I gave him a wary look and said that I'd bring a bottle of Scotch over.

It was dusk. The two of us were seated on the veranda of his house with a half-empty bottle of whisky on a camp table in front of us. We sipped our drinks contentedly. From the village for the past hour the drums had throbbed and reverberated and we expectantly awaited the start of the dance.

Down the drive they came, twenty youths clad in loin-cloths and twenty girls in their revealing 'Maro Adis', a length of coloured dress draped over one shoulder and tied at the waist.

They came slowly, singing in two columns. The night air was heavy with the fragrant scent from the frangipane trees and fallen blossoms carpeted the path in front of them.

The youths were on the left and the girls on the right. They were led by four conch-shell blowers whilst four drummers followed, rhythmically keeping time to the singing:

'We sing to the Leopard River
  Flowing through our land,
Providing life for us
  Our camels,
  Our sheep,
  Our goats,
  Our cattle.
We sing to the Leopard River
  Flowing through our land,
It waters our crops,
  Our sim-sim,
  Our cotton,
  Our maize,
  Our cassava.'

Slowly the dance began. The full moon revealed itself suspended high above the swaying palms as the river, flecked with gold, flowed past in murmurous anticipation.

The line of twenty youths now faced the line of twenty girls a few yards apart. The dance, accompanied by rhythmetical stamping of the feet by the youths and monotonous clapping of hands by the girls, gained in urgency as the sinuous swaying bodies moved forwards and then backwards, ever quicker.

The girls sang:

'We sing to the Leopard River
Flowing through our land,
Let us feel your thighs
Harder, ever harder
Pressing on ours.'

The youths replied:

'We sing to the Leopard River
Flowing through our land
You now feel our thighs
Harder, ever harder
Pressing on yours.'

The girls then sang slowly, but faster now as the tempo of the conch-shell blowers and drummers increased in urgency:

'We sing to the Leopard River
Flowing through our land
Our loins are now ready
So ready to receive you.'

The youths replied, stamping vigorously in a frenzy of lust:

'We sing to the Leopard River
Flowing through our land
Your loins now receive us
As we thrustfully enter.'

Faster and faster now, and as the line of swaying, suggestive bodies met each youth removed the top part of his partner's dress exposing her breasts. Then to a crescendo of drumming and stamping the half-naked girls tore off the lower part of their dress and offered themselves. Each couple closed and fused in a fury of primitive, promiscuous passion.

4

INDO ADDE's successor, Met den Herrewege, had arrived to take over the Station for Indo Adde, on promotion, had been transferred to the Ogaden to open up the frontier post of El Carre to combat the growing Shifta menace there. I was sorry to see him go for he had taught me a lot and had proved a wonderful friend.

Met was a Belgian. About forty years old, thick-set and going bald. He had, I heard, escaped from the Germans after Belgium had been overrun, had made his way through France to Spain, thence to England where he joined the British Army. A born soldier, he wore an imposing array of decorations including the Belgian highest award for bravery, the equivalent to our Victoria Cross, the British Military Cross and the French Legion of Honour, together with the usual campaign medals. Before the war he had farmed in the Congo.

Of an excitable temperament he was a little critical of our somewhat paternal methods of administration as compared to the tougher policy adopted towards the natives in the Congo.

What is the happy medium? To this day I do not know. Treat the native harshly, educate him up to a point and then no further, keep him down, and there is no safety-valve when the day of reckoning comes, as inevitably it must. On the other hand, treat him on equal terms, pander to his ever-increasing demands, build him hospitals, schools and colleges where he learns to read and riot and the results are pretty much the same. For their veneer of civilisation is ice-thin and gratitude an unknown word to them.

Met had very firm views of women. He was a lusty type and on the occasional week-end had a couple of Italian dingbats up from Mogadishu. Evidently he did not believe in any form of recompense for they complained to the brigadier of his unsympathetic treatment of them.

The amusing outcome of this incident occurred in his office whilst I was prosecuting in a Court case. His clerk answered the phone and told him that the brigadier wished to speak to him. Met picked up the receiver and I saw his face change from a normally healthy pink to a puce colour as he

listened to the griff. It sizzled. After about five minutes when he managed to get in an odd indignant splutter he suddenly exploded, roaring in his broken English, 'You no understand, sir. Met den Herrewege has these girls to Afgoi. I admit. He wines them. He dines them. He makes the so splendid love to them and Met den Herrewege he no pay for love!'

Crash went the receiver and that was that. Due to Met's blood pressure Court was adjourned.

He didn't last long after that, being quickly transferred out of the Territory, and that was the last I saw or heard of him.

Shortly after this incident I was summoned to Mogadishu and told that I was to be transferred to the Mijjertein, to the Furthest Shag of the Never Never Land, first of all to an island called Dante for a few months and then to take over a place called Alula.

A few days later I handed over my platoon of Wakamba and with Yusuf perched on top of my belongings motored to Mogadishu, where I would be spending a few days in the Gloom-box prior to the start of my eight-hundred-mile journey up north.

There was quite a crowd of fellow officers in the Gloom-box—the Gendarmerie mess—that night, some on local leave from the Shag, others like myself awaiting posting, plus a couple of Mogadishu types, Dizzy and Finnegan, who lived there permanently. Finn was a big Irishman who played the 'cello when he was drunk. He was playing the 'cello. Dizzy, who looked a complete idiot behind his thick-lensed glasses, was playing lying dice with Mac, a kilted Scot in the corner. They were sitting on the carpet. The stake for each game was a bottle of Cioffi gin wompo. Dizzy's looks belied him, for as I entered he called Mac's bluff, who resignedly passed over a bottle of Cioffi which Dizzy opened with remarkable rapidity. He was surrounded by bottles, mostly empty, and looked rather like an overgrown child building a castle with the empties turreted around him. Bruce, an athletic, good-looking Ulsterman only twenty years old, had already made a name for himself in the Ogaden fighting Shifta. He was now busy sawing the legs off an occasional table so that he could sit in comfort on the carpeted floor in true Somali fashion. Bruce didn't believe in furniture. A hole in the sand, fashioned to fit the hip-bone was all he asked for. I was greeted enthusiastically by these types and Finn waved a shaky bow in the direction of the bar and asked me to have one on the Gloom-box mess. I helped myself to four fingers of Cioffi gin topped up with tonic water, then was buttonholed by Bruce, who picked up a table leg and began to trace an imaginary battle plan of the dispositions of his platoon in his recent action against the Shifta. The carpet

suffered in consequence. The party developed. Towards midnight, Hutch, an ex-gunner, with the cold blue eyes of the born gun-layer, forgot he was seconded to the infantry and began to fight his battles in France over again.

At his given word of command of Number 1 gun fire, an empty Cioffi bottle flew out of the open window, followed by a second, third, fourth and fifth as Hutch enthusiastically shelled the imaginary enemy. The empties finished, Dizzy scuttled away anxiously clutching an armful of unopened bottles as Hutch bellowed for more ammunition. The chairs followed, then the occasional tables, which left the radiogram. Brian, the P.M.C., was playing a desperate tug-of-war with Hutch in trying to save it. Finn had fallen over his 'cello and was happily oblivious to the party when in walked Major Lloyd-Dorian, the senior officer of the mess.

A small, dapper man with an abrupt manner, he was not popular.

'What is the meaning of this hooliganism?' he icily asked.

'Number 1 gun——' began Hutch and looked suggestively at the Major, who hurriedly left, slamming the door behind him. The party continued and broke up in the early hours. Over breakfast we were all informed by an irate Major Lloyd-Dorian that we were to be wheeled in front of the colonel at 1000 hours that morning. The interview was brief but stormy. In short, we were all given twenty-four hours to get out of Mogadishu, irrespective of whether we were sick, on local leave or awaiting our postings.

With a fiendish hangover I set about organising for my safari the stores and supplies to be collected the following morning. To Transport to see that the diesel was ready; to the Mad House to have the specie ready—boxes of silver rupees, the pay of the Somali askaris at Dante, who had not been paid for four months. Then to Forte Cecci to collect an escort, in this case five Mijjertein Somalis returning to the company, one from sick leave and four from courses at the Training Depot; to the Post Office for mail to be jettisoned off at the various Stations *en route*, and lastly to the B.M.A. Canteen to order tinned food, pears, peaches, apricots, plums, sausages, bacon, soups, jams, treacle, sugar, flour, tea, coffee, sauces, biscuits, and all the bits and pieces which were quite unobtainable up north. The all-important wompo, for the thirsty types in their lonely desert outposts, was not to be forgotten, their boxes were all ready for collection, neatly labelled and addressed. I ordered my own. Six bottles of beer a month was the ration, and half a bottle of whisky. To augment this inadequate supply of the Inglesi's camel's milk I went on to Fabbri's to order a crate of Cioffi gin, a crate of mixed liqueurs and two crates of Old

and Bold brandy, which, in an emergency could be used in pressure lamps. Only in an extreme emergency though, mark you. I bought a gramophone and a couple of dozen records. Missing my cricket at Afgoi I purchased a 22 × 5 yard strip of coconut matting and a couple of extra 'pudding' balls.

Back at the B.M.A. Canteen for a few things I had forgotten, Mrs. Ritchie, who ran the canteen, reminded me that this was the month of December and didn't I want some special Christmas fare for the festivities in the bush? I thanked her and vaguely ordered a box of crackers. Kindly soul that she was it was only when I unpacked my boxes at Dante that I found she had packed me almonds and muscatels, tinned turkey, a tinned Christmas pudding and all the trimmings that go with the festive season. A crowd of us gathered that evening and had a typical Italian dinner at the Croce Del Sud. Minestrone, followed by ravioli and an enormous slice of 'Dolci'. We drank libations of Asti Spumante followed by Milliefiori with our coffee. We then did the rounds. First to the Smash and Grab, on to the Aldebaran, the Tennis Club, the Officers Club, the Savioa and finally, the Lido, on the sea front. We staggered back at about 2 a.m. singing the Gendarmerie Marching Song:

'There's a house that is painted bright blue
  Near the back streets of Mogadishu
Where in day's long ago when we ousted the foe,
  It was well stocked with whores ninety-two.
Now they have all gone away
  To B.M.A. to get better pay—
But the Lido's quite new, and they have some too
  So to hell with the house painted blue.'

In the morning, Rino, the Italian driver allocated to me, was singing an aria from *Pagliacci* as he supervised the loading of the drums of water and dieseline. He was a handsome man with glossy black hair, swarthy complexion, toothbrush moustache and a splendid mouthful of gold teeth. A cheerful bird.

'Buon Giorno, Signor Tenente,' he said. 'Come sta? Bene Yes?'

'Bene No,' I replied. 'Troppo brandy, troppo gin, troppo Spumante, troppo tutti.'

'Basta, come for ze birra. A hair of ze beetch.'

'Uno per la strada—chin, chin.' We clinked glasses in the little bistro opposite the Transport Depot.

'Due per la strada—salute.' I began to feel better.

We then clambered aboard the diesel, collected my escort of five Somali Gendarmes from Forte Cecci, back to the Gloom-box for Yusuf and my kit, then to our various ports of call for the rest of the kag. The clock from the cathedral chimed ten o'clock as we chugged up the Strada Imperiale on to the Afgoi road on the first stretch of our eight-hundred-mile journey. I was safely out of Mogadishu on time, little knowing that I wouldn't be back for one and a half years.

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5

OUR route took us to Afgoi and as we approached the familiar fields of cotton, crossing over the Uebe Scebelli, I felt quite nostalgic. Then on to Villaggio, but as I thought of Indo Adde's rum parties I shuddered and didn't mind so much leaving Afgoi and the rum behind me.

From Villaggio to Bulo Burti, thence to Belet Uen on the Scebelli, a dusty walled village fringed by dom palms. Here we pulled up a few minutes to collect firewood, which we loaded on the diesel, for there would be none at our night-halt in the bush.

On to Ferfer, where civilisation and the tarmac road finished. The Mijjertein lay to the north of us, across hot and seemingly endless miles upon miles upon miles of desert wastes. As we progressed the scattered acacias disappeared and only termite-hills shaped like huge phallic symbols, the older erections worn away to thin, tapering spires, obelisks and turreted castles, remained to relieve the monotonous view. Rino was silent, concentrating on his driving, and only uttering a 'Madonna mia' as the diesel bumpingly crossed a track over the road, stamped into the deep red sand by countless camel caravans. I was intrigued by the termite-hills and later was to learn that the termite queen is a prisoner in her hard clay cell in the middle of the hill. She is a few inches in length, fat and white. Her sole function is egg-laying and she lays an average of 150,000 eggs every twenty-four hours. Her millions of male slaves, called 'Abor', laboriously build the hills from their saliva and sand and only become restive for new ground at the onset of the rains, when they grow wings and migrate. They then shed their wings and start building again; they will devour anything, cloth, leather, wood, and are preyed upon by ant-bears, birds and lizards. The down-country natives regard them as something of a delicacy.

The sun began its decline and as the purple shadows played over the desert I awoke from the reverie I had fallen into, suddenly saying, 'Rino, Basta'.

He was half-asleep over the wheel and jumped as if he'd been shot.

We turned in. Camped in the middle of nowhere, with Rino on one side of the diesel and myself on the other. The askaris and Yusuf huddled together near by, their blankets pulled up over their faces, looking like a group of shrouded corpses.

When dawn came, I washed and shaved from my canvas wash-bowl, then watched the Somalis awake. They washed themselves out of their water-bottles, using the water sparingly as they poured a little into the palm of the left hand, bending their heads slightly they swished the water round their faces then drank a little from their bottles. The next twenty minutes was spent in prayer. We waited for them to finish as we sipped our coffee, then we were off; Rocco Littorio, or Galkayu as the Somalis call it, was our first stop. For the first fifty miles the country remained completely barren, then dotted here and there, though sparsely, appeared the acacias.

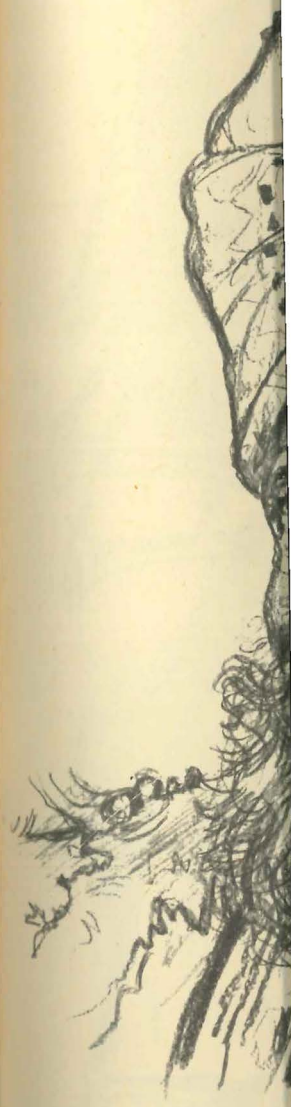
We now began to pass through country showing traces of game, and it was here that I saw my first dibatag—the only area in the world where it is to be found.

The dibatag has the reputation of being shy and difficult to shoot; it is not unlike the gerenuk, though somewhat smaller. It has the gerenuk's long neck and browses off the acacia. The females are hornless and the males' horns measure up to twelve inches. They are very handsome and curve forward similar to the reed buck.

The coat is uncommonly pretty, purplish grey with the face markings a deep brown. Its habits appear to be similar to that of the gerenuk, but unlike the gerenuk's crouching gait the dibatag trots away with his head carried well and his comparatively long tail carried up in the air, often curving over its back. Slenderly built, it is a very elegant gazelle.

On we trundled, averaging a steady fifteen miles an hour. A pair of secretary birds looking like giant silver pheasants were stalking over the sand. Handsome birds with their white and pale grey above and black below. Above the aquiline beak is a crest sweeping over the head. They feed off insects, ants and snakes; the latter they kill by stamping on them with their talons or by flying with them at a height, then dropping them on stony ground, so breaking their backs.

A large herd of Sommerings gazelle, called by the Somalis 'aoul', were grazing on both sides of the track in front of us. They took fright as the huge metalled monster of a diesel relentlessly bore down on them. They were off, hundreds of them, rushing this way and that in their eagerness to escape from the unknown. The aoul, not unlike the Grant's gazelle, has a conspicuous white patch on its rump; the strongly annulated horns are



Somali Chief of the

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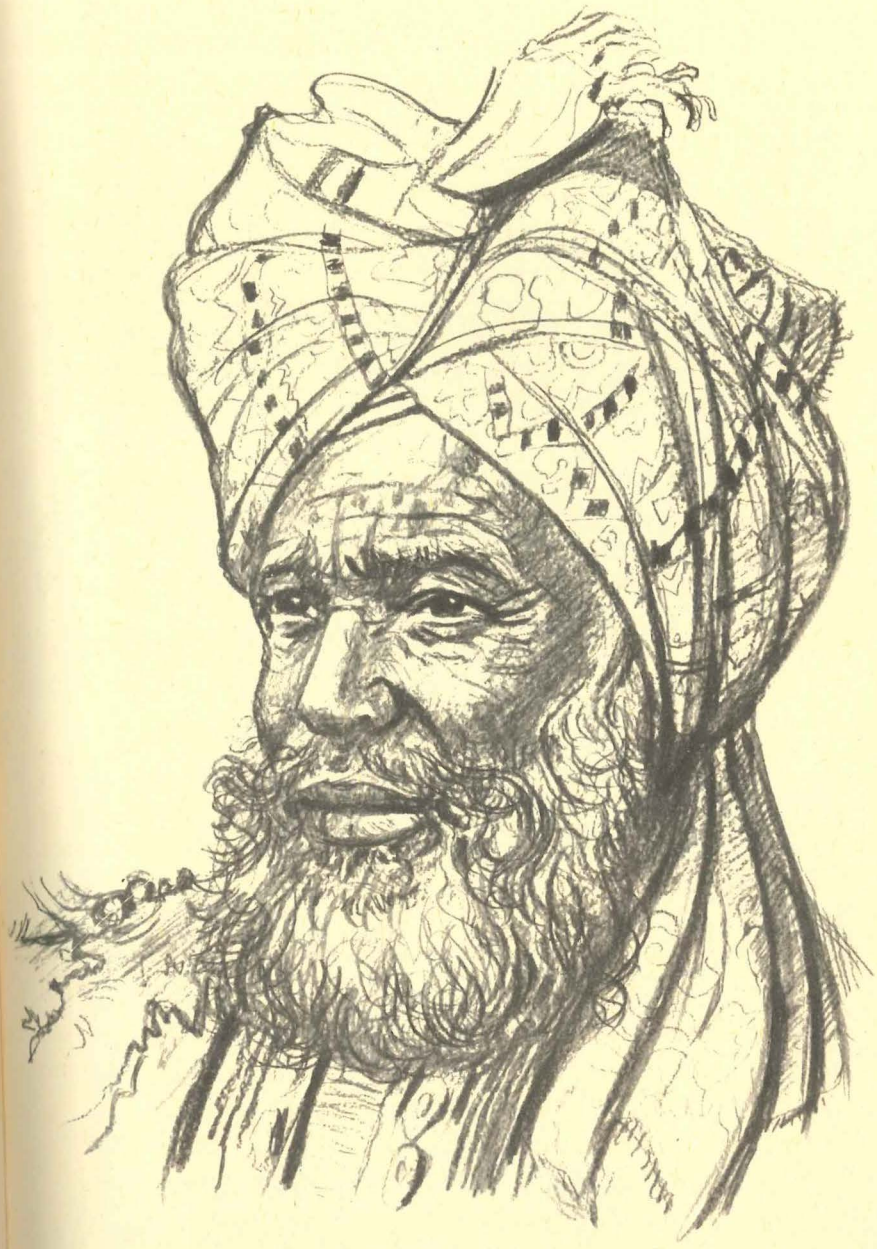
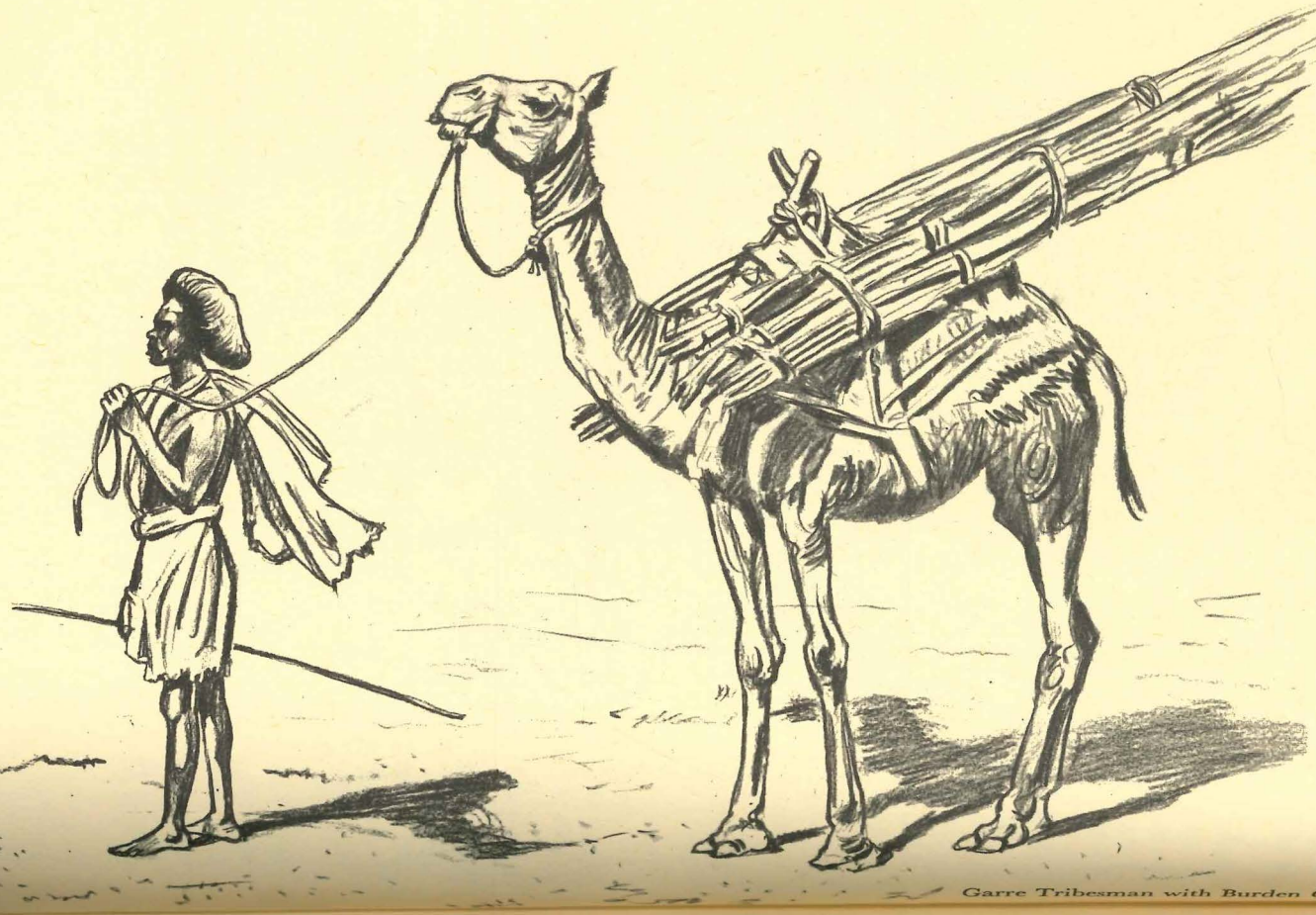
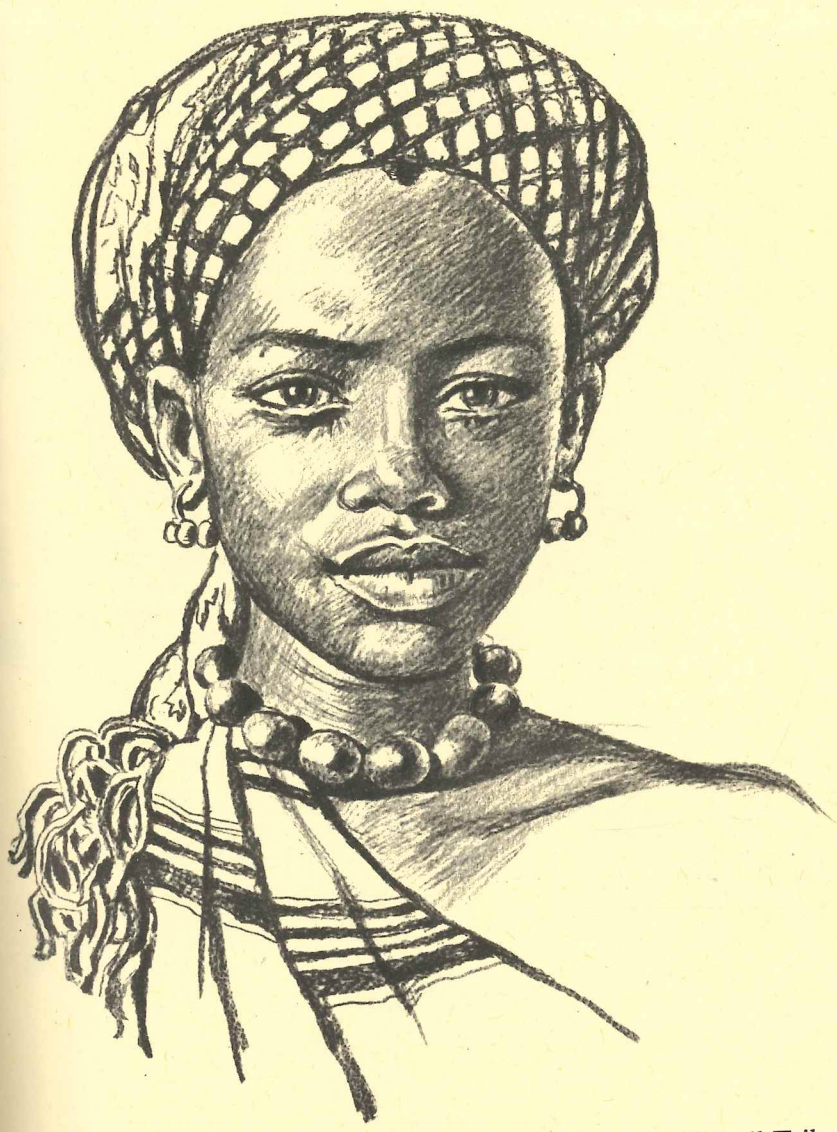


Somali Chief of the Garre Tribe



Garre Tribesman with Burden Camel

Garre Tribesman with Burden Camel



Somali Woman of the Galgail Tribe

Uadan Girl in Dance of the Leopard River

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Haji Dif of the Isshak Tribe, British Somaliland

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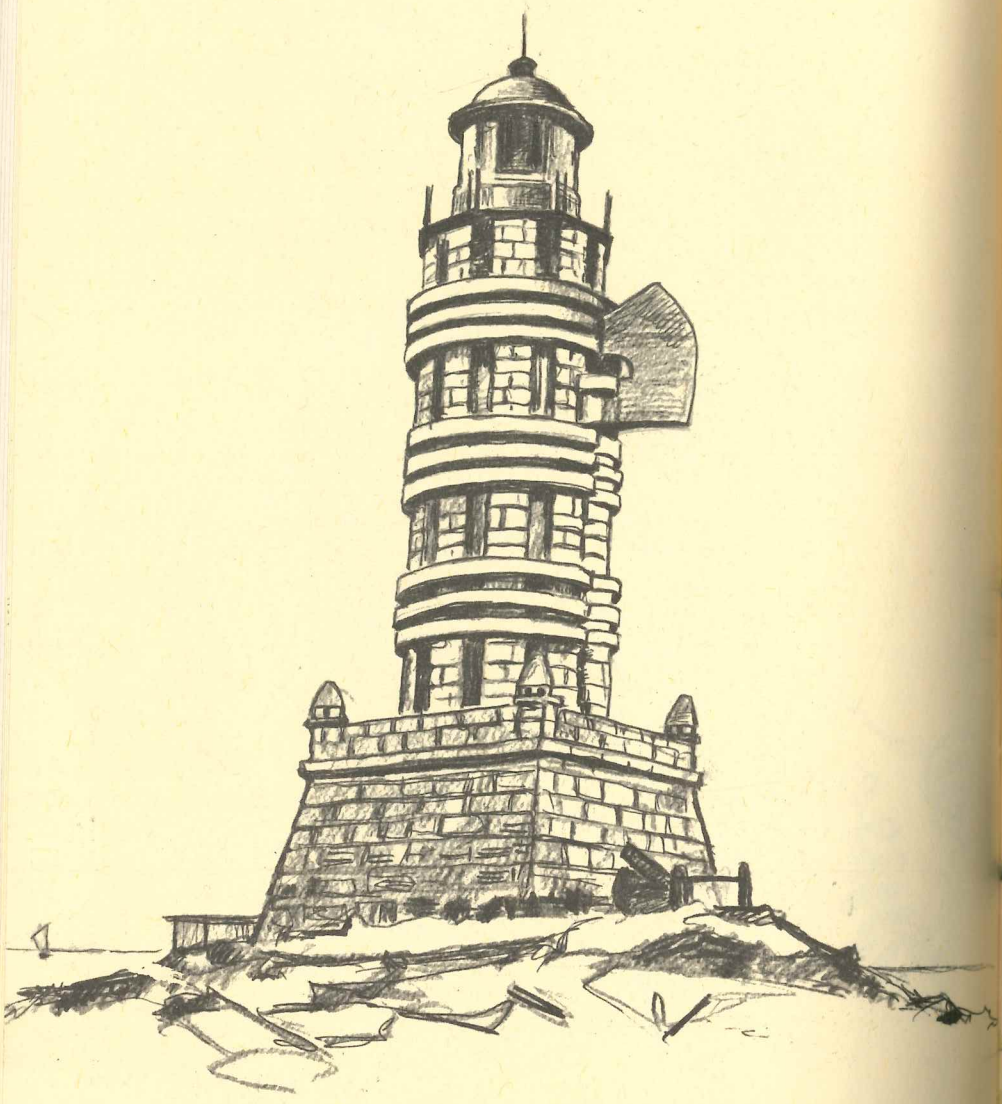
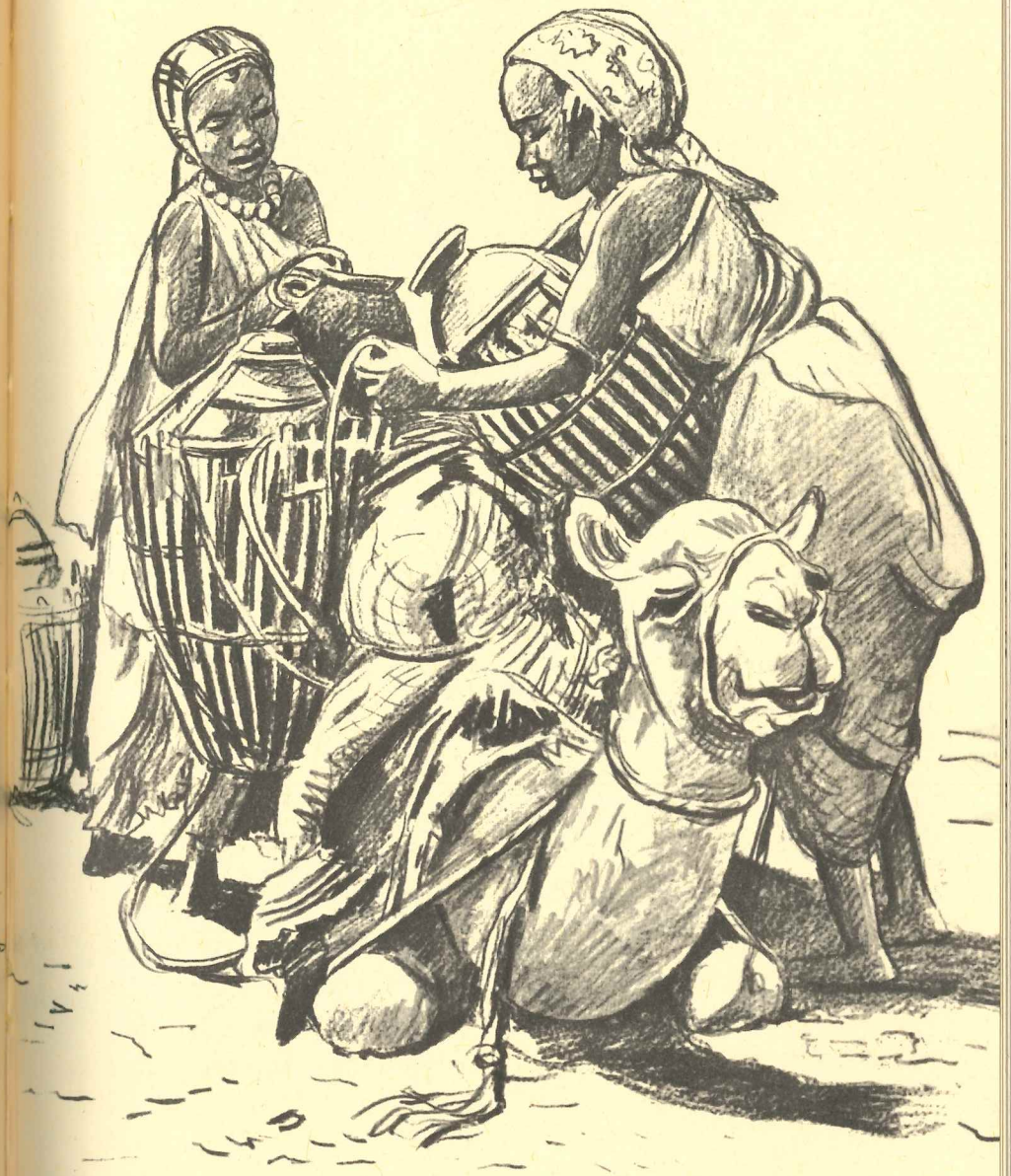
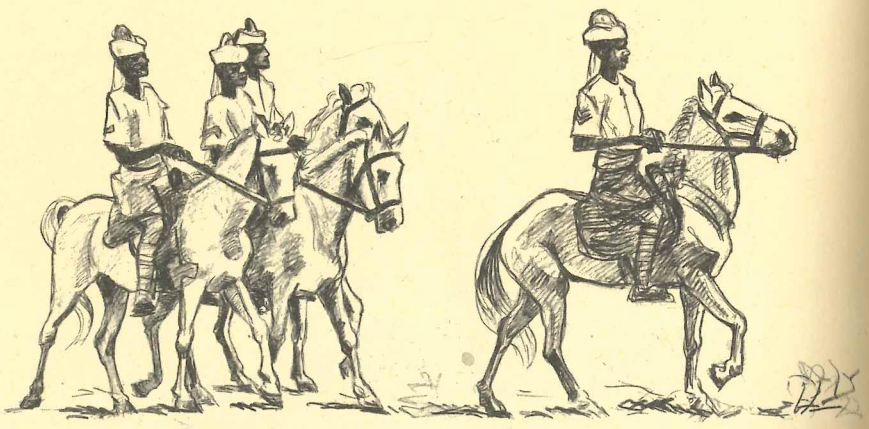
Sultan of the Mijjertein



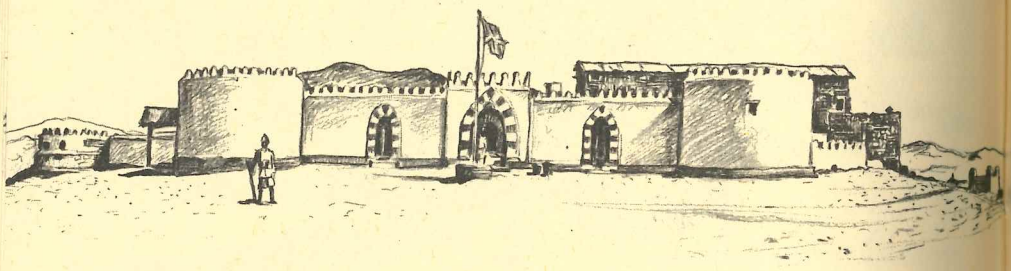
Cape Guardafui Lighthouse



Two Somali Women Loading Up



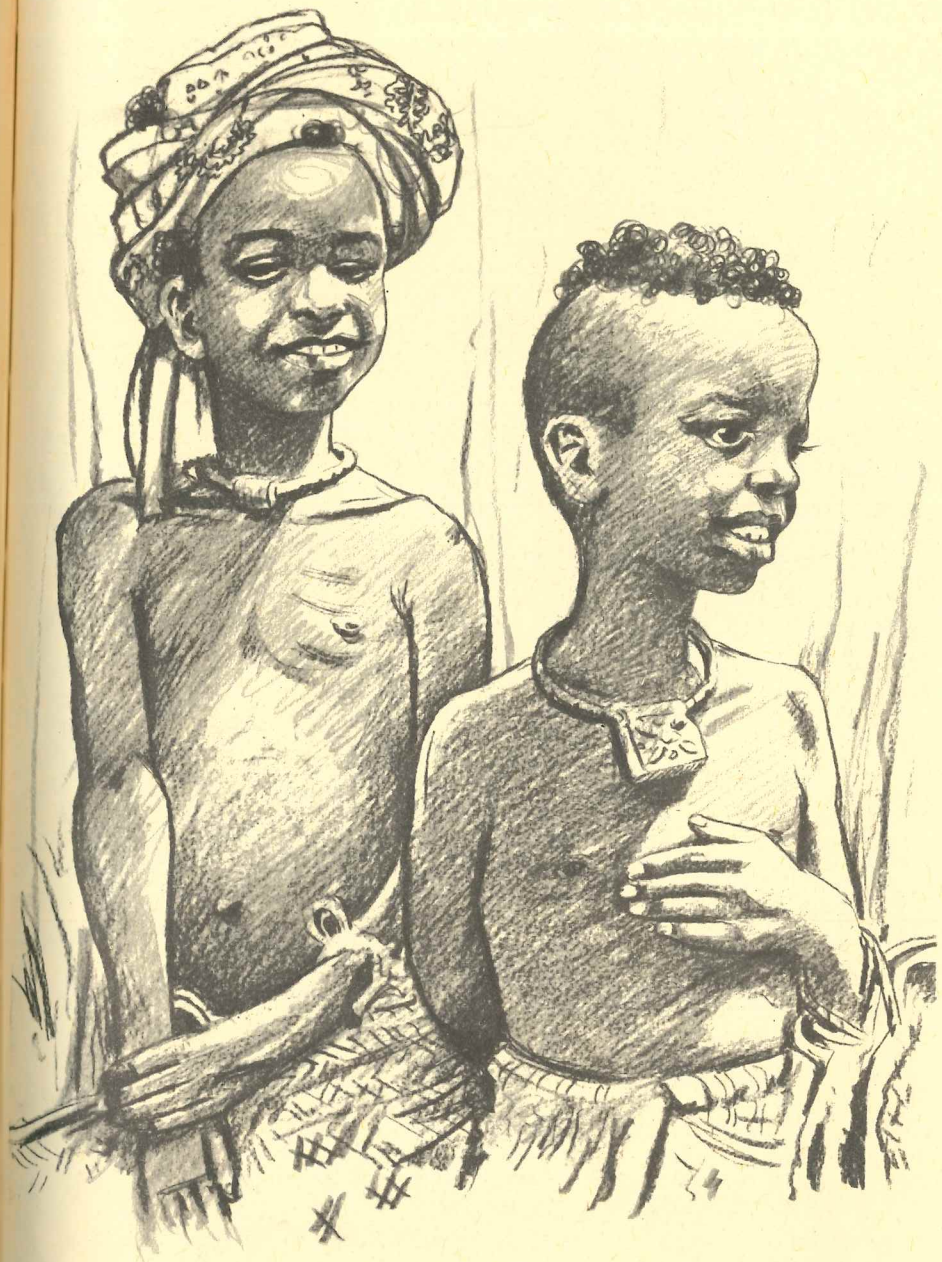
Somalia Gendarmerie Mounted Infantry



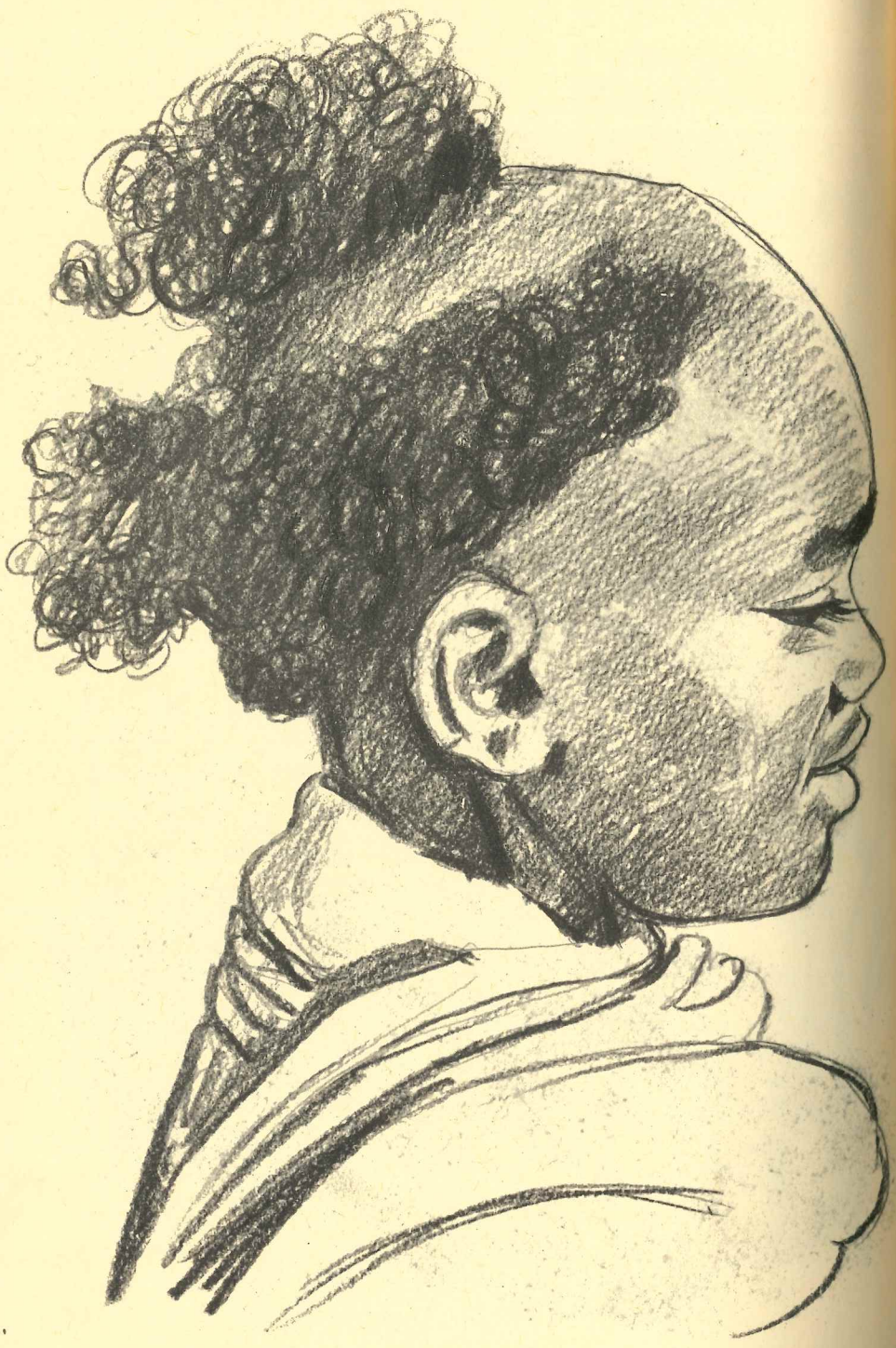
Iskushuban Fort

Somalia Interpreter – Mohammed Jama

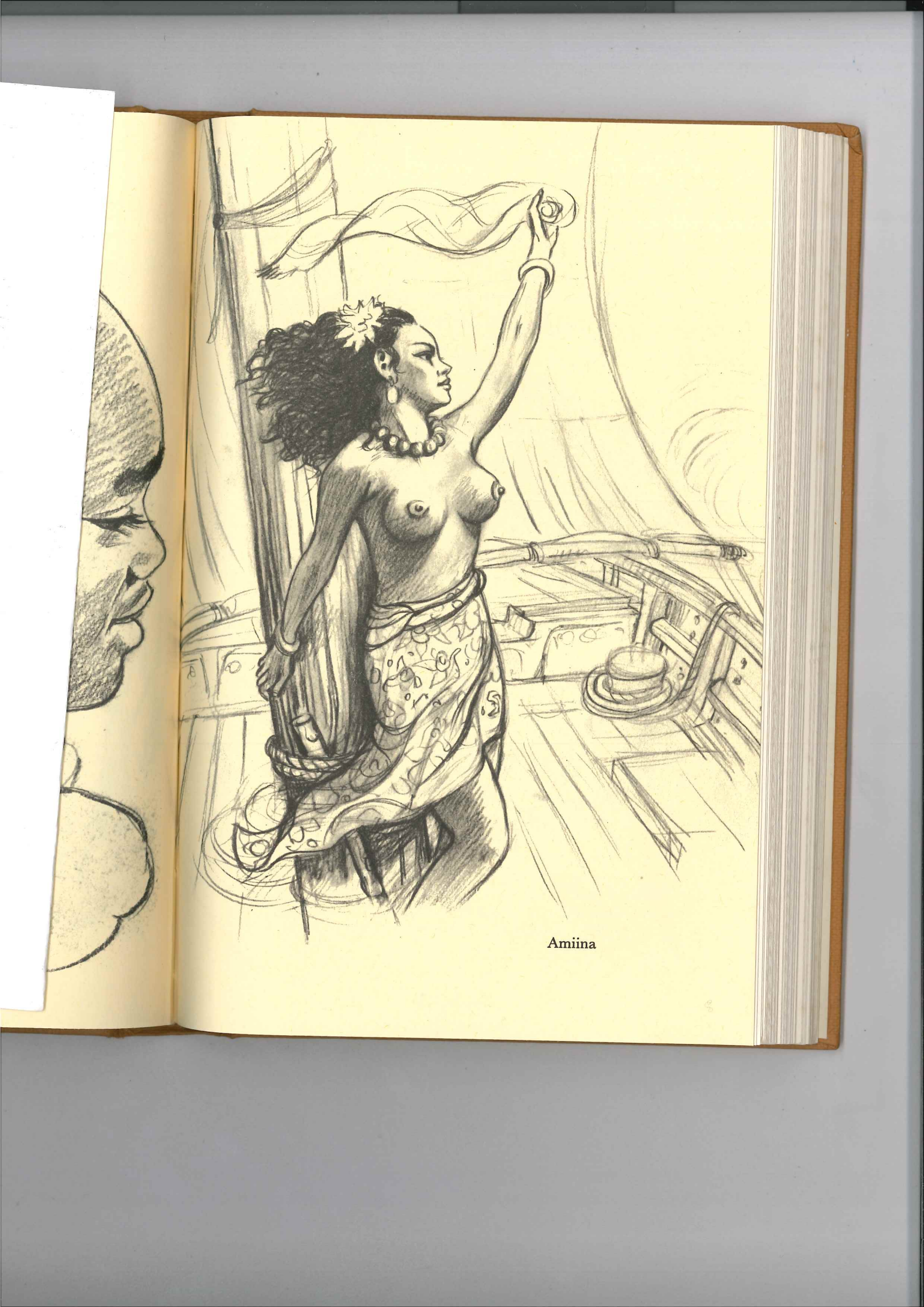
Shifta



Two Somali Boys



Gherire Boy



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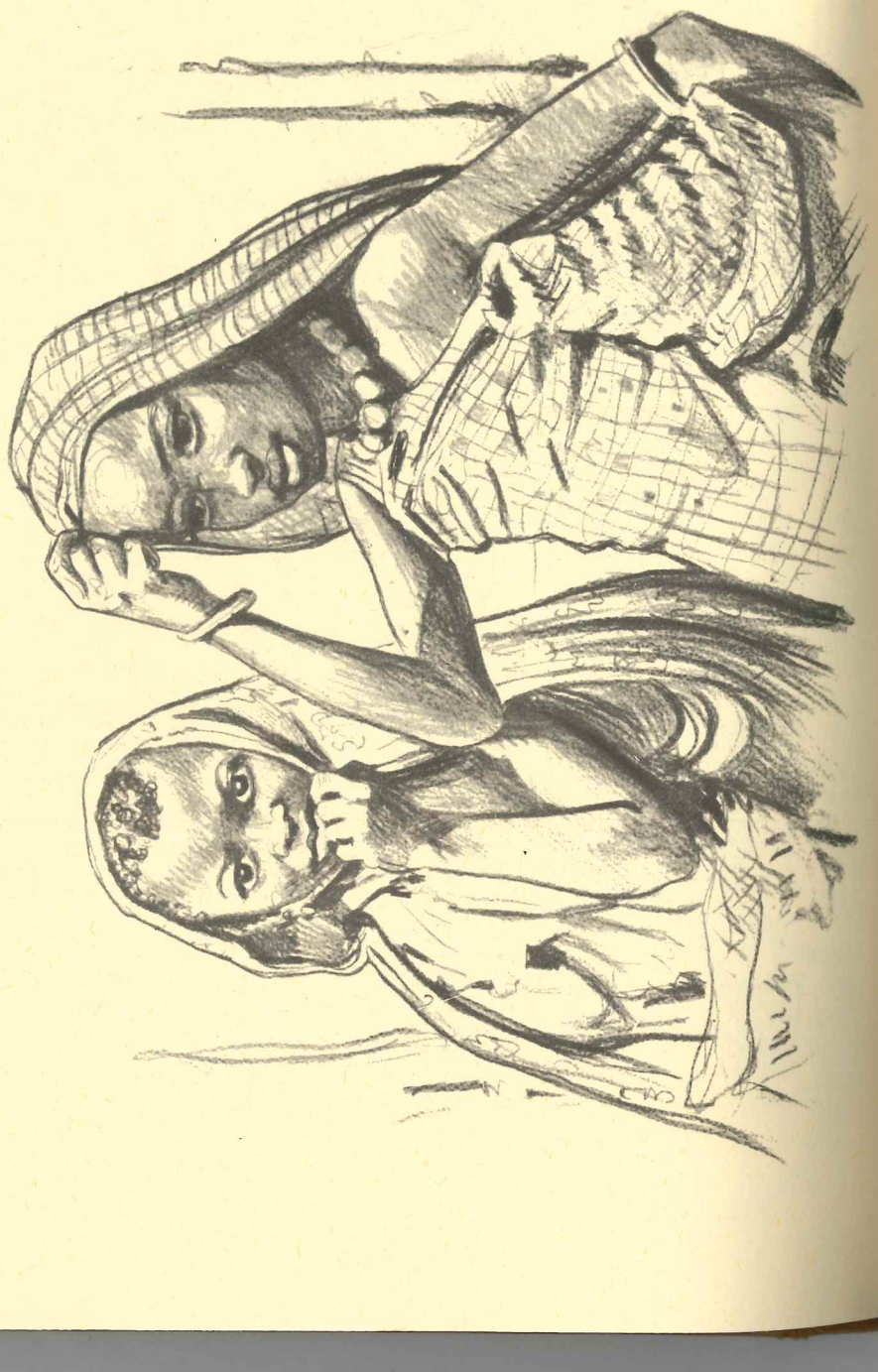

Two Somali Girls

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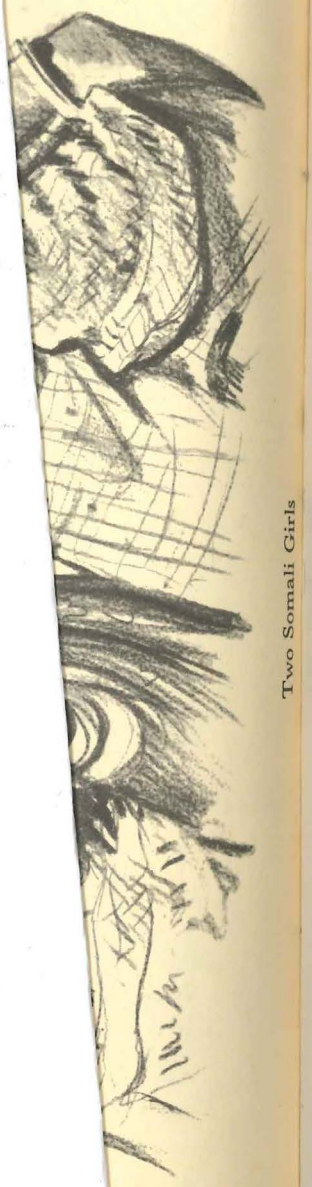

Two Somali Girls

of a distinct type, the points curving sharply inwards towards each other.

It was now approaching midday and through the heat haze Galkayu loomed up on the horizon. It looked very lonely as we approached, with the Union Jack lying limply against the flagpole.

Fitz, who I remembered from the draft, and hadn't seen for a year, came out to greet us. We shook hands.

'Wompo?—the mail?' he asked breathlessly.

'All aboard,' I assured him, 'plus a basket of vegetables and fruit.' I had remembered to bring up a basket for each of the Stations *en route*. He almost swooned with delight.

'You'll stay the night?' he asked almost pathetically.

'Glad to,' I reassured him, for why the hell should I press on? What was a lost hour, a day, a week, or even a month in this loneliness?

We off-loaded his two crates of wompo and the mail, then the fruit and vegetables. I left him there for the moment, a peeled banana in one hand and a hammer in the other, frantically opening his canteen boxes. Rino pushed off a few hundred yards in the diesel to stay with the only other European at Galkayu, an Italian Locust Control Officer.

Fitz had been at Galkayu about a year and that evening bombarded me with questions about Mogadishu. Was it true that old Fellows-Smith had ended in the bug-house? Was this true, was that true? Had I heard that poor old So and So had shot himself at Dante? No, I hadn't. He had apparently received the griff on the sand vine only yesterday. We talked and talked until there was nothing more to talk about and then started all over again.

His one solitary pressure lamp died down. He made no move so I stood up and pumped it—the sudden glare lit up the drab room. A cockroach scuttled across the floor. A praying mantis, grass green, settled on the lip of my glass of Old and Bold, its beady eyes revolving round the room as it stood on its back legs and then with its minute tongue licked its front ones. I flicked it off; it joined the moths which fluttered through the open window, attracted by the pressure lamp, to burn their wings as they dropped fluttering to the stone floor. Crickets chirped noisily outside, then stopped as suddenly as they had started leaving an uncanny silence in the outside world. A solitary jackal yelped into the still night.

We finished off his bottle of Old and Bold. I produced another.

Fitz thought of something else to say.

He told me a rambling story; the all too familiar tale of one tribe raiding another and the subsequent litigation which followed in his Court, for he was acting District Officer here as well as Gendarmerie Officer.

'I listened to their griff,' he said, his eyes absent-mindedly followed a lizard on the wall.

I counted the flies in its transparent belly as it came my way with a sudden, smooth dart, to suck in another with its lightning tongue.

'I listened to the griff for days,' he continued, 'and then gave my judgment. Do you know what happened? Here? Right here in my Court-room? A bint—the decision had gone against her tribe, the Habr Yunis. On evidence they were clearly the aggressors. This bint took out her left breast and squirted a stream of milk right in my face.'

I blinked. 'What did you do about that?' I asked him.

'Charged her with contempt of Court,' Fitz replied moodily. 'What else could I do?'

I roared with laughter, but he wasn't amused. I still rocked with laughter as I helped myself to another drink. Fitz was very much the serious type with his studious face and thick-lensed glasses. Of all people such an embarrassing situation could only have happened to him.

The boy came in and announced that dinner was ready; evidently Fitz had forgotten about it. His face lengthened when the usual 'mbuzi' (goat) was served, but he enthused over the dish of vegetables, carrots, green peas and potatoes. He said he hadn't had any greens for six months. Again I rocked with laughter.

Helping himself to another spoonful of vegetables he suddenly sat bolt upright in his chair.

'Do you hear them?' he asked excitedly.

'As a matter of fact I don't—hear what?' I was puzzled.

'Those damned ducks again, every time I eat, usually about now they perch on the roof and start up their infernal quacking.'

He was quite agitated.

So was I, for I knew that apart from the chain of wells some hundred feet deep, adjacent to the station, there was no water to be had for over a hundred miles.

'Yusuf,' I called, 'bring my shotgun and the ammunition.'

I had acquired an antiquated Italian hammer shotgun at Afgoi and this, together with the .256 Manlicher Indo Adde had given me, comprised my armoury.

I walked outside and loaded the gun. Looking on the roof, just to make sure that the ducks were not in residence, I took a brain shot at the man in the moon and pulled both triggers, ejecting the empty cartridges.

The quiet night was shattered by the yelping of the pie-dogs from the village and the Corporal of the Guard's hoarse words of command as he

turned out the guard. The alarm whistle shrilled. The guard came over at the double. I assured the corporal that everything was under control. He saluted, relaxed, and they returned to their post.

'Sorry, Fitz,' I said, walking into the house. 'I missed both barrels.'

'Ah, well,' he replied philosophically, 'I don't suppose we could expect green peas *and* duck.' I'd had it.

Saying 'Good night', I went to bed. Fitz didn't move. He was asleep in his chair when I walked into the living-room the next morning with my cup of tea. He snored gently. The sordid debris from the evening's party was still on the table, an empty bottle of Old and Bold and a second, half-empty. The pressure lamp had burnt itself out and the glass was discoloured with a sooty film. A circle of dead moths lay on the floor around the lamp standard. A colony of ants were struggling on the cement floor to remove a morsel of food. Through the open window I saw the guard commander change his sentry.

A new day had started.

We were off by nine o'clock. Fitz apologised for passing out. Shaking hands I left him as we headed north in a cloud of dust. We progressed steadily, then the tediousness of the journey was relieved by our crossing a winding 'lac', a dry river of seasonal life which twisted itself westwards towards the far coast-line.

A cheetah had made his kill in a clump of reeds in the 'lac', so asking Rino to pull up I walked over to where he sat crouched over the kill. The cheetah, unlike his fiercer cousin the leopard, is quite harmless. I approached to within about ten yards of him, my rifle ready, and looked into his beautiful, amber eyes, studying him closely. There he crouched, begrudging my approach, then moved off in a series of graceful bounds, with his tucked-up hindquarters built for making him the fastest animal in the world.

His partially eaten prey was a male Speke's gazelle, called by the Somalis 'dhero'. A very handsome animal and something like the Thompson's gazelle, with a similar median band and face markings of black and white. He possesses above the nose a peculiar patch of loose skin, which is often inflated, causing a protuberance.

The diesel laboriously ground itself out of the soft sand in the 'lac' and climbed the far side, Rino exhorting it up the slope with his favourite cuss-word of Berdio! Berdio!

For every burning mile of sand and scrub left behind endless miles still lay ahead. This was the Greater Shag.

I was fascinated by its wild loneliness; it held one so completely at its

mercy; once lose yourself and nothing but a miracle could save you. There was no civilisation here—nothing. No water, no Somalis, no friendly karias, few animals and fewer birds. An occasional brace of noisy crested lapwings would rise at our approach, wheeling over the diesel with their protesting cries of alarm.

The sun seared down.

Heat waves danced in the distance and trees reflected in blue water, blue like a bird's egg, only to disappear at our approach for the mirage it was. Objects appeared magnified, for I mistook a herd of 'aoul' for camels, so long did their legs appear as they stilt-walked their leisurely way and crossed the road far in front of us.

The diesel boiled. We stopped and clambered out of the cab, which was like an oven. I touched the radiator. You could fry an egg on it. Lethargically Rino spannered open one of the forty-four-gallon drums of water and siphoned it out through a long rubber hose, into the panting radiator. Yusuf and the askaris clustered round after the precious fluid, catching the water in their cupped hands from the squirting hose, noisily sucking it up into their mouths. I drank, but the water was hot to the mouth. Rino adjusted the handkerchief wound round his forehead to keep the sweat out of his eyes and looked around him. He drank and spat out the warm water contemptuously.

'Somalia, Somalia,' he said. 'Sabbia, troppo Sabbia.'

We pressed on, following the red ribbon of road and after motoring another couple of hours Garoe magically appeared; an isolated little Beau Geste of a fort with turreted ramparts, built on a promontory overlooking a dried river bed.

We drove through the archway and into the courtyard of the fort, and the sentry saluted me as I stepped down. I returned his butt salute. The sahib? The sahib was out, he informed me, with half his platoon. On safari chasing camel thieves.

As I climbed the stone steps a crow took off from the battlements and cawed at me as he flapped away and perched on a near-by tree. The Somalis have a tradition that the crow, originally white, became black for his sins. I cawed back at him. Entering the little living-room, with the usual bare, whitewashed walls, I helped myself to a drink of water from the absent officer's 'chargol', a canvas water-bag, which hung from a nail in the wall, cooled by a kindly breeze which came through the rifle-slits opposite and overlooking the native village down below.

I rested during the afternoon and later that evening walked down to the village watching the camels, sheep and goats come in to drink from the

water-holes in the river bed. It was an attractive sight to watch the Somalis, stripped to the waist, bailing out the water into leather buckets—the 'nad'—as they filled the wooden troughs.

They sang to a kind of a chant the stock knew so well. 'Ho-a, no-ah, te-da-ta, eh ali ya ha, ho elli yo ha!' (Drink pretty creature drink).

I turned in early, lulled to sleep by the 'whoo-whoo' of an owl, called by the Somalis 'shimbah libah' (lion-bird), as he called away in his loneliness to the pale moon riding high in the heavens outside.

We were off with sunrise for Gardo, a hundred miles to the north, which we reached at midday. Considerably bigger than either Galkayu or Garoe, it consisted of a jumbled-up collection of forts built round deep wells where the tribesmen from a radius of a hundred miles watered their camels in their thousands upon thousands.

Here I reported to the Provincial Commissioner, a grizzled, one-armed veteran, and to Joe, several years my senior, the commander of 'D' Group, Somalia Gendarmerie stationed at Gardo with a company at Gardo, Dante and Bender Kassim. I learned from him that the company at Dante supplied a detachment of one platoon at Alula, where I was to be posted after a few weeks at Dante. A fairly restrained dinner with the Provincial Commissioner followed and I was off again at first light. Through Laz Dawa, Iredame, El Dere, and Meledin, life-giving water-holes until we reached Iskushuban. An officer of the Camel Corps from over the border in British Somaliland was in charge here; a little later to be relieved by a platoon of Gendarmerie. I passed courtesies with him, making a friend for life by leaving him a couple of bottles of Old and Bold, and a few pounds of fruit and vegetables from my own scanty stocks. From Iskushuban we climbed steadily through the mountainous Gargorre range and it was here that I caught my first glimpse of the beira, a dainty little gazelle, rare and local. He was perched high up on the rocks, standing motionless on his round, padded hoofs; of a french-grey colour and pinkish-fawn underneath. Through the glasses I could see his horns about five inches long, partly obscured by the big ears. He had a whitish ring round his eyes and a short, bushy tail.

Through the pass we now dropped steadily to the salt-flats of Hordio. On the sea-front it appeared deserted and the derelict, rusted Italian machinery rose stark above the whitish salt pans. Rino told me that before the war about one hundred Italians worked here supervising the collection of the salt from the pans where it was loaded into huge buckets and conveyed to the island of Dante, over the isthmus some ten miles away, where it was loaded into the ships standing out at sea. He pointed out to

me the long line of concrete pillars as far as the eye could see, with a cable system linking each pillar and the buckets, now rusted, hanging uselessly down. Indistinct over the bay I could see the blur of land that was Dante, called by the Somalis Hafun.

The wind sighed through the deserted shells of houses and whipped up little swirls of sand. This small centre of civilisation that once existed was fast being obliterated by the remorseless hand of nature. An open door hanging on one hinge swung drunkenly to and fro as we pulled up in the middle of this desolate village. A solitary gull, perched on one of the roof-tops, lazily took to the air at our approach.

It was the most utterly God-forsaken place I had ever seen.

'Guarda quella maledetta sabbia,' said Rino. I mentally agreed with him. There was a lot of sand. He reached resignedly for a bottle of cognac, pulled the cork and passed it to me. I drank. He drank. I then sent Yusuf to see if he could find any signs of life in the apparently deserted buildings. Giving orders to the askaris to off-load my kit into one of the less dilapidated-looking houses I awaited his return.

About half an hour later he came back with a decrepit-looking Somali dressed in a faded blue tunic and shorts. He had an Italian forage cap on his head, blue, edged with gold cord. He wore well-worn puttees. His feet were bare. He tottered up, gave the Fascist salute, then sheepishly, awakening from his dream world, touched his cap in a form of naval salute.

'Buon giorno, Tenente,' he croaked. He scratched his navel.

Yusuf informed me that he was the caretaker. He looked a very far gone one. Obviously the oldest and only inhabitant, he must have been here for years. He raised a bit of interest when I asked him if he could get me a dhow to cross the bay to Hafun and said he could have one ready early next morning.

Saluting again, he took two paces backwards, about turned and went off to organise a dhow, happy in having met someone to give him an order and happier still in doing something for the first time in months.

The setting sun turned the colourless wastes of sand into a soft pink. An echelon of gulls flew overhead. Sand-crabs scuttled sideways out of the house as I entered. The askaris were giving a hand in putting up my camp bed. Yusuf was busy chopping up an old door for the evening's firewood. A bat flew out of the room, crazily winging its way through a broken window-pane as it blindly flitted into the early night outside.

For dinner we had a large tin of soggy steak and kidney pudding, rendered palatable by copious draughts of Chianti, followed by tinned apricots for dessert. I turned in, pulling a blanket over my head as a

fine, white sand filtered in through the broken door and open window.

The next morning at sunrise we off-loaded the diesel, manhandling the stores, rations and boxes of specie into the empty dhow as it rocked gently, anchored in the shallow water. Shaking hands with Rino I wished him a good trip back to Mogadishu. 'Arrivederla, Tenente,' he called as he quickly climbed into the diesel. 'Ho fretta.' Leaving a plume of dust behind, he certainly was in a hurry as the diesel headed back for Mogadishu and civilisation.

We boarded, and at the nakhoda's (dhow captain) word of command, the crew of five coastal Somalis gave the Somali equivalent of 'Ho, heave ho', hauling up the anchor and then pulling on a rope, hoisting the large, triangular sail, and we were off, tacking into a freshening breeze for Hafun.

The ghost-town of Hordio receded and away to our front I could see the blur that was Hafun some ten miles away.

The water in the bay was beautifully clear, shoals of brightly-coloured fish appeared under the hull of the dhow. A shark, his dorsal fin cutting through the water like a streamlined triangle, crossed our bows. The fish panicked and scattered in a flurry of colour as his sinister shadow passed over them.

'Ponte Carduce, sahib,' called out one of the askaris pointing ahead. To our front I could see a bold mass of rock thrusting above the sand dunes which the Italian workmen, sand-happy and nostalgic for Italy, had named after Mussolini, the Duce. In the rock I could distinguish his face in profile, the jutting, arrogant chin as he broodily surveyed the sandy wastes, once part of his former African Empire.

6

As we fast approached a jetty, the nakhoda called for the sail to be lowered, skilfully steering the dhow alongside, gently bumping against a buffer of old diesel tyres tied on to the side of the jetty.

Well, so far so good, I thought. We've made Hafun, but now how the devil do we get to the other side of the island?

Paying off the nakhoda thirty rupees for the hire of his dhow, I was just on the verge of telling Yusuf to try and organise camels when I saw a most extraordinary sight. Coming up a rusty, single-track decauville railway line which I had failed to notice, was a tiny railway engine with three miniature carriages swaying precariously behind it.

This phenomenon rapidly approached, black clouds of smoke billowed out of a tall stack on the engine on which were sitting, bolt upright, two uniformed Somalis, holding long-handled shovels at high point. A Gendarmerie officer was driving the apparition which came to a grinding halt a few yards short of the jetty. It was Arthur, who commanded the detachment at Hafun where he had been banished over a year before.

I remembered the story. He had first been posted to Merca, a coastal station south of Mogadishu, had done extremely well there and had rapidly been promoted captain. Celebrating his promotion in the 'Benane d'ora', the local bistro, with a crowd of other thirsty souls, mostly Italian farmers who grew bananas on the River Juba, the party developed, and when everyone was on the wing a sing-song started.

One of the farmers wouldn't or couldn't sing and Arthur, completely screechers, called the landlord for a pot of red paint. Aided and abetted by the other Italians present, the unfortunate man then had his trousers torn off him and Arthur went to work with the paint brush. Dear old Arthur, here he was, cheerful as ever. Of medium height with reddish hair and a droopy moustache, he had a florid complexion and perpetually pink eyes. He really was a Shag-bag.

Taking a pipe out of his mouth he roared (Arthur never talked), 'Jambo Doug'—he always called me Doug.

We shook hands.

'Have you got the booze?' he asked.

'I've got the specie and the mail——' I began

'Bugger the mail, chuck it in the sea—have you got the BOOZE?'

'Yes,' I laughed, 'stacks of it.'

He thumped me on the back and we both roared with laughter, apropos of nothing. It was good to see him again.

'Abdalla, Musa,' he yelled. The two chums perched on the engine ran up, stood to attention, sloped shovels and saluted him with cracking butt salutes.

'What the devil do they do?' I said as I stared at these two worthies.

'Well I'm blowed,' he laughed. 'Haven't you heard of the "Teresina". This Heath Robinson contraption is the "Teresina" and old Abdalla and Musa here shovel the sand off the line when the kherif bogs it up. You'll see.'

'Come on Abdalla, Musa,' he ordered in English. 'Move. Open the booze. No, not that box, you clots, that's labelled Gin—can't you read after all the English I've taught you. G-I-N gin. Open the beer booze. Sanduki ile, tazama, beer, B-E-E-R. The Inglesi's camel milk.'

'Beer,' echoed Abdalla and Musa in unison, then proceeded to tear the box apart. They pulled two bottles out of their straw packing, quickly and efficiently bit off the two crimped caps with their teeth, giving us each a bottle.

I was impressed.

'Cheers, Doug,' said Arthur. He gurgled away the contents taking his second bottle from an attentive Musa. He gasped with pleasure.

'Stone all the crows, but that tastes good. My first beer in one hundred and fifty-five days. We mustn't drink it all though,' he said, anxiously eyeing the boxes.

'We'll have a party tonight at the "Dopo Lavore", the Italian club, to celebrate your arrival. I had a hunch you'd be arriving today, all the Italians—there's eleven of them still to be evacuated to Mogadishu—are busy brewing grappa for your reception.'

Loading up the three carriages Arthur contemptuously sniffed at the two bags of mail.

'Rockets from headquarters,' he said. 'Anyway, they'll be four months old by now at least. Damp squibs.'

We climbed aboard. He expertly shunted the engine on to a side line, then back on the main one and we were off, Abdalla and Musa perched each side of the snorting stack which was reinforced to the body of the engine by lengths of camel rope. We rattled along the straight at a good

old lick and I gave him the Mogadishu griff. He gave me the griff from Hafun and confirmed that the District Commissioner had shot himself ten days ago.

'A damned shame,' he said gloomily. 'He was a good bloke—went completely round the bend.'

We relapsed into silence.

The single-track line threaded its way through sand dunes, when he suddenly brought the engine to a shuddering stop on an acute bend. The kherif had been at work here and for several yards the track was obliterated under a thick layer of sand. Musa and Abdalla jumped off, quickly had the line cleared and away we went again. A little farther on came a derailment, but Castor and Pollux with commendable efficiency quickly righted the carriage, lifted it on the track, then off again went the Shag-bag Express, lickety-spit for Hafun. After a couple more derailments we arrived.

Hafun must have been quite a thriving place during the Italian régime; there were several large salt factories, now badly holed by the shelling from H.M.S. *Dorchester* during the war, also about twenty sizeable, double-storeyed houses, the 'Dopo Lavora'—the Italian club—and a mission, now deserted. Beyond was a sandy bay with the native quarter nestling to the south of it. The town reminded me of the flicks: of a ghost-town in the Western States after the gold rush and exodus of the miners. It had the same air of desolation about it.

The moment we pulled up about a platoon and a half of gendarmes excitedly crowded round the train. Several rushed forward to caress the boxes of specie, for they had received no pay for four months.

'Sergeant-major,' roared Arthur. He came up, halted, saluted and flashed us a happy smile when Arthur said that magical word 'lag' (money) and informed him that pay parade would be at 2 p.m.

'After the pay parade we can relax,' said Arthur.

'Discipline has gone to pot a bit, but you can't blame the poor blighters being full of griff when they've not been paid for so long.'

The specie was loaded on a large four-wheeled barrow and taken under guard to the armoury, whilst the wompo, my kit and the despised mail went on a second barrow to a double-storeyed house on the sea-front that served as the officers' mess. I would be billeted here with Arthur.

The pay parade was an amusing affair. Arthur had two platoons at Hafun and one platoon on detachment at Alula, completely isolated, farther north. As the sergeant-major called out each man's number, rank and name the askari would march into the office, halt, salute and receive his pay in rupees. The piles of rupees, twenty to a pile were neatly stacked

on the table in front of us, hundreds of them, and as each man was to receive his four months' back pay, amounting to about 120 rupees, a carrying problem was presented.

The first askari managed. He saluted. Arthur took his receipted thumb-print on the nominal roll in front of him whilst I dropped the 120 rupees into his cupped hands. He looked steadily to his front, took one pace back, about-turned and marched out. The second askari was not so fortunate. I dropped the pile of shining rupees into his cupped hands, he endeavoured to salute and a stream of rupees flew in all directions with the askari on his hands and knees frantically chasing them up on the office floor. In the end we instructed the men to remove their 'kulas', I would drop the money into their hats and on this occasion we would dispense with the salute.

We finished the laborious job of paying out the sixty-odd N.C.O.s and men by about 4 p.m., went to the mess, stripped off and went down to the sea for a swim.

I prefer to forget the party at the 'Dopo Lavora' that evening, for I was left the next morning with the most fearful hangover I've ever had.

At the Italian club Arthur had introduced me to eleven Italians who were all wildly excited at the prospect of being evacuated to Mogadishu. They had originally been left behind to look after the buildings and installations belonging to the 'Society Saline Somalo', the Italian firm who owned the salt works. Most of them had been on Dante Island for several years and after a few glasses of grappa each one cheerfully admitted that he was 'io sono insabbiato' (far gone in sand). They had recently received the news via a nakhoda up from Mogadishu in his ocean-going dhow that a relief ship was on its way to collect them and they were celebrating.

Grappa is distilled from dates and each one of them over the years had experimented in adding this and that in order to make the resultant brew more palatable. They had brought their own bottles. I tried them all. Some were flavoured with peppermint essence, some with apricot, others with lemon, and so on.

I have no recollection of when the party finished, but when Yusuf brought in my early-morning tea I felt like death warmed up.

Just before the war, in the summer of 1939 before I enlisted in the Army, I had made my first century at cricket and I remembered the wise words of my mother after two members of the team had brought me home from the celebrations at the White Hart Hotel, Sherwood.

'Douglas,' she remarked sadly, 'even the beasts of the field know when they have had sufficient.'

I groaned and tottered away to the shower, then putting on my shorts

and a pair of 'tackies' went into the blinding sunlight to take the two platoons on physical training. From the office window I could hear Arthur bashing madly away at the typewriter in an effort to complete the various returns, long overdue, I had brought up in the mail. He had built a fiendish battle course and this had to be negotiated. A twelve-foot wall to scramble up and over, a row of suspended tyres to dive through, a pegged-down net to wriggle under, a deserted house to enter, up the rickety, worm-eaten stairs to the first floor, followed by a death-defying leap from the upstairs window and then a race to the sea-shore where we had to swim out to a wrecked dhow, climb aboard, dive off and back to the parade ground. The Grand National was chicken-feed compared to this. In my weak state I had to lead this caper and make damned sure that I was back on the parade ground ahead of the troops. After breakfast, which I couldn't face, bayonet drill followed. Arthur had a highly organised daily training programme mapped out for me and I was a complete wreck at the end of the day. This routine followed, week in and week out, and the Somali troops recovered from the lethargy into which they had fallen as the two of us knocked them back into shape. So much so that after six weeks Arthur declared the company second to none and said that I had now better proceed to Alula as planned and take over the detachment there from Pip, who was due for relief.

I left the following day on the puffing 'Teresina' and at 3 p.m. crossed the bay, sleeping the night at Hordio. I had with me Yusuf and an escort of one section of Gendarmerie. Telling the corporal in charge to have twenty camels organised for me in readiness the next day, we left at first light, reaching Bargal on the coast at dusk, having marched just over eleven hours. Bargal was an attractive little coastal village and I passed the night in an old Arab-type house. Off again the next morning with the camels tied nose to tail. We camped the night at Idtho, still by the sea, where there was a small, salty, water-hole surrounded by durr trees which the grazing camels ate, getting salt from the leaves.

The third day we were off before dawn, leaving the coastal strip, for the mountains now swept sheer down to the sea. We headed up a steep, tortuous track through a long range of mountains which fringe the Somalia coast from Tajurrah to south of Cape Guardafui. These mountains were composed of limestones and full of fossil shells. Irregular ravines divided the masses of hills which were dotted with the aromatic 'malmal' (myrrh) and the 'luban' (incense) trees. Deep down in the inaccessible gullies were thorn trees bearing a gum called 'falafala', a species of frankincense.

We toiled on. At 9 o'clock we reached the top of a massive headland

called Ras Shenegaf and this was the most desperate track of all—just a worn path in the rock face with a drop of 2,000 feet to the sea. The heat was intense and I decided to rest for an hour, giving both men and camels a breather. Away from the rock face there was a small clearing in the hills, big enough for the camels to graze. Giving the order to off-load I gratefully perched myself on the edge of the cliff and looked down at the emerald sea below. Suddenly a school of dolphins broke through the glassy surface, coming up to blow, submerging again then leaping and playing on the surface.

All too soon the hour's respite was up and saddling the camels we trekked. The last camel refused to move in spite of its owner jerking at the halter, which had broken away from the tail of the camel preceding it. He kicked it in the belly but although bellowing his protests still refused to move. He then pricked it in the backside with his spear. No future. The rest of the caravan had moved on for safety, following the winding track and away from that awful drop. The recalcitrant camel was sitting only a few paces away from the edge of the cliff and as luck would have it was loaded with my personal belongings. My two boxes of liquor on one side and to balance this load a box containing my gramophone and precious records together with my camp bed on the other.

Desperate measures were called for.

I instructed Yusuf and one of the askaris who had remained behind to collect firewood, although I knew there was precious little to be had. They collected a pathetic handful of twigs together with some dried leaves. I built a small fire under the camel's backside. I struck a match. Came a little breath of wind and the flame flickered out. I tried again, carefully protecting the tiny spark with my cupped hands. It caught fire and a sizeable flame shot up. So did the camel with a hoarse scream of protest, racing up the path after the rest of the caravan.

Yusuf and the gendarmes laughed delightedly at my strategy but the camel-owner, upset because I had succeeded in moving the obstinate 'gel' where he had failed, scowled his disapproval. We slowly weaved our way through the mountains and descended to the coast-line again.

Very tired, we reached Tohen at night just as the stars appeared, camping in a little date grove where I was made welcome by the local Akil, Musa Barre, a venerable Somali Chief, who brought me gifts of a 'tebed' of camel's milk and fresh dates. Delicious dates, golden yellow, just picked from the palms. Telling Yusuf not to bother with my camp bed, I took off puttees, boots and socks and thankfully lay on a bed of dried palm leaves and sleepily watched the moon playing hide-and-seek in the

scudding clouds above me. The trade-winds whispering in the palms sang a soft lullaby.

We were off again at sun-up, reaching El Laz just before midday. A pleasant little oasis in the desert where we off-loaded and lazed for an hour before setting off for Bereda, a small coastal fishing village where we spent the night.

Yusuf told me that it was here that Darod, an Arabian noble, many centuries ago was cast adrift as a boy and later in life married a Somali girl named Donbirro and so founded the great Darod section of the Somali people.

On the sixth day the caravan snaked its way along the sea-shore, leaving the forbidding mountains, now a blue haze, to the south. The going was pleasant in the soft, white sand. I took off my boots, puttees and socks, walking barefooted ahead of the plodding string of camels. Northwards, ever northwards with the sun now beating down its blindingly brilliant heat from a clear blue, cloudless sky.

Dream-walking, I looked up and far away, following the curve of the shore, dancing tantalisingly in the shimmering heat-haze, I could see a cluster of white buildings at the very edge of the sea. Alula was in sight.

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7

I QUICKENED my step and Yusuf, who had caught up with me, said that in the Somali language Alula means pearl (lul). Alula itself is a small, isolated, inaccessible fishing village some twenty miles north of Cape Guardafui on the Somaliland coast in that vast territory which forms the geographical feature known as the Horn of Africa. The inhabitants are mostly of the Suacron tribe, their staple diet being fish and dates. They trade in pearls, dried shark (the fins of which are highly prized as an aphrodisiac) and the incense and myrrh which grows on the hills in the hinterland.

We approached nearer and fringing a lagoon just to the south of Alula itself I could see the several magnificent buildings, the largest of which was standing only a few yards from the sea. A double-storeyed stone house, dazzling white in the bright sunlight with the Union Jack fluttering above.

Suddenly the sentry spotted our approach. I could hear him excitedly calling for the guard commander and the latter's words of command as he turned out the guard. The arrival of a European at Alula was quite an event.

Pip came out of the house and walked quickly over to meet me. I now had the griff, for as we shook hands I said, 'The wompo, booze, stingo, or whatever you yourself call it is on the camels a couple of miles back.'

'The mail,' he said urgently. 'What about the mail? I've had no letter from her for five months. Five long bloody months.'

'Stone all the flipping crows,' I said, using Arthur's favourite expression. 'No letter from whom?'

'From my wife, you clot,' he answered peevishly. 'Where is the mail?'

'On the last camel—what the hell did you expect me to do with it, carry the bag over my shoulder?' I replied crossly.

'Sorry, old boy, come on in. Oh, Haji Dif, meet the new sahib, the Collins Sahib, who is taking over from me. This is Haji Dif, your interpreter.'

I shook hands with a tall Somali. He wore the traditional Moslem robes

complete with green turban denoting that he was a 'Haji' and had been to Mecca. He had intelligent eyes and the northern Somali's aquiline nose adorned with a straggling grey moustache. He was bearded, about fifty-five years old, I judged. I liked the look of him.

'Howde, sahib,' he greeted me. 'Say, which part of the Old Country you from?' He spoke atrocious English with a strong American accent.

'A little village called Sherwood, near Nottingham, Haji.'

'Say, you come from Nottingham? I been there. The Bloody Sheriff, Robin-Hood-Maid-Marian-and-the-Holy-Man-Friar-Tuck, say, I knew 'em all. I been to Cardiff—Tiger Bay—London, Land's End, Birmingham. I been to the States, three, four times, Noo York, Chicago——'

'Haji Dif,' interrupted Pip. 'How many times have I told you not to say "Bloody"? Now stop bulling the Collins sahib, you'll have plenty of time for that in the next year or so. Off you go and hustle along the camels.'

'O.K., sahib, I'll have the bleeding camels here pronto,' said this most amusing interpreter as he salaamed and strode off.

'Well, come on in,' repeated Pip. We walked into the house, past the office and up the stairs to the rooms on the first floor which were his living quarters.

'Help yourself to a drink. Sorry I've nothing alcoholic. That and the lime juice finished months ago, but there's cool water in the pitcher there.' He pointed to a large earthenware jug in the corner of the room. I dipped in a cup and drank.

'Excuse me, I think old Haji's got the camels here already, I'll just run through the mail and then we'll have lunch. Make yourself at home.' He dashed down into the office below.

Looking idly around me I studied the living-room. The usual white-washed walls with two grinning shark skulls and crossed jagged-toothed swords from the swordfish relieved their bareness. The room was immense, with good furniture and bits and pieces which the Italian Residente must have left behind. Exploring I found that there were three good-sized bedrooms, dining-room, store, and a kitchen apart from the living-room. A spacious veranda ran round the back of the house which would be cool in the heat of the day. There were no windows in the frames, which were fitted with heavy wooden shutters to keep out the fierce kherif wind.

I must have fallen asleep in my comfortable armchair when Pip, calling for lunch, awoke me. He paced up and down the spacious sitting-room.

'Let's have a wompo,' I said.

Calling Yusuf to produce a bottle of Cioffi gin I took the lanyard out of my breast pocket to which was attached a whistle and a bottle opener. I

spannered open the bottle and poured out two generous tots, topping up the glasses with water.

'Cheers,' I toasted him. He sat back, slumped in his chair. Brooding, he took a small sip, saying nothing.

Lunch was served. Roast goat, together with the vegetables I had brought up from Mogadishu. I called Yusuf aside and told him to open up a tin of pears. Pip ate moodily but plucked up enough interest to finish off the pears.

'Not had fruit for months,' he muttered.

'Another drink?' I asked.

'Good God, no,' he jumped out of his chair, looking at his watch.

'Come on, it's two o'clock and you've got to take over the Station this afternoon.'

'This afternoon,' I protested. 'I'm shagged—it took me six days to walk here, remember?'

'The cash is all ready,' Pip replied. 'You've only got to check it. My handing-over notes are ready on the desk. There's only one shauri outstanding, a perennial one. The question of the Midgan-owned date garden at Ghesseli. The Isman Mohamed are claiming it again. Say No. It's all on the files. All in black and white. Everything is on the files going back to Italian times. You've brought the new uniforms, the 'lag' for the troops? Good. Pay 'em out tomorrow. My platoon is the best in the Territory.'

All this I knew. Arthur had told me that Pip was a fine soldier, a keen disciplinarian, and that when he last visited Alula, several months ago, he was most impressed with the bearing of Pip's platoon.

'But what about the outlying coastal villages?' I remonstrated. As well as being Gendarmerie Officer here I would have also to take over the far more exacting duties of Political Officer. 'What about the lighthouse at Cape Guardafui?'

'Bugger the lighthouse at Cape Guardafui. Once a month for the past year I've walked from Alula to that blasted lighthouse and back to see that the light is functioning. I'm not going again. Take over the Station now, there's a good chap. Everything's in order, I warrant you. Look, my dhow's waiting for me.' He pointed out of the window to a dhow, tugging at the anchor in the shallows below us.

'All my kit is aboard and everything's ready. If I miss this wind now, and it's likely to change at any moment, I shall have to walk it. With a good wind I can be at Hafun in four days.'

'Righto, Pip.' I was resigned. 'Come on.'

We walked into the office. He unlocked the safe and took out the

contents. We counted the piles of rupees, the soiled, grubby notes smelling of ghee, and they tallied with his Imprest. I signed for the cash on balance. We browsed hurriedly through his handing-over notes and I asked the odd question. He had Haji Dif bring in the notables and Akils and introduced them to me. He also introduced me to a smooth-looking chum named Idris Ibrahim, the District Clerk. 'And that little character is Sinbad.' He pointed to a diminutive Somali yero seated cross-legged in the far corner of the office. 'He's the punkah wallah.' Sinbad was dreamily pulling a length of camel rope which ran from a punkah above us, through an iron hoop on the ceiling with the end finishing in his grubby paw.

'They'll be perched outside the office tomorrow like a flock of vultures. Waiting for you. They'll try everything on you, but before giving a decision look up the files. The system is fool-proof. The answer to this, the answer to that. It sends them mad when you look up the files. It defeats them. You can trust old Haji Dif—up to a point. He's a good old stick. He's a "Som-Brit", a British Somali from Hargeisha, and consequently is not too mixed up in the local intrigue and chicanery.'

He looked at his watch.

'It's five o'clock already. Will you inspect the platoon?'

They were on the parade ground, right-dressed in their three sections. Their uniforms were ragged but they were good. I knew this in a moment. I met the sergeant, Ali Jami; the full corporal, Omar Ali; the two lance-corporals and the twenty-seven other ranks. Through Haji Dif, Pip made them a short speech and then said his 'Nabad gelyo' to them as he intended sailing at first light. They broke ranks and clustered round him, shaking him by the hand. He was popular with them and they were genuinely sorry to see him go. I was an unknown quantity.

Entering the house, Haji Dif loitered about. It was dusk now.

'Good-bye, Haji,' said Pip.

'I'll see you 'board tomorrow, sahib,' replied Haji gruffly. 'Is everything loaded, your books, your clothes, you got that Somali dagger I gave you, sahib? I'll go and tell that bloody Nakhoda, he's a Suacron bastard, to have the dhow ready first light.'

'Good old Haji Dif,' muttered Pip, brushing his eyes. 'He's a rogue in some ways but a damned good bloke—now, where is that wallop of yours?'

We slumped into our chairs. The pressure lamp burned steadily. The two shark skulls grinned down at us malevolently from the walls. The window shutters rattled slightly and the wind dreered in from the lonely outside world.

'Well, what are we going to drink, Grappa, Old and Bold or Cioffi gin?' Pip queried.

'Not any of those.' I went into my room and triumphantly returned with a bottle of Johnnie Walker, one of my precious two bottles which were to have lasted me for four months. The reaction had set in on Pip and I determined to raise his spirits.

'Whisky wompo,' I said, flourishing the bottle.

'Oh, good man.' Pip took the bottle and fondled it reverently. Opening it I poured out two stiff tots, filled up the glasses with water and toasted him a good voyage down to Mogadishu. We clinked glasses. He remarked that he hoped I wouldn't go round the bend at Alula.

I could hear the sentry pacing his measured beat down below. Left-right, left-right, left-right, left-right, left-right, left-right. Halt. Left-turn. Order-arms. Stand-at-ease. Silence. Attention. Slope-arms. Left-turn. Left-right, left-right—— The wind rose outside and gently rocked the pressure lamp, anchored to the ceiling by a long piece of wire. It threw leaping, distorted shadows over the walls. I reached for the bottle. It was nearly empty.

'Gorma sorta daman?' (When will dinner be ready?) called Pip to the kitchen.

His boy quickly brought it on and we sat down at the table.

Roast goat with the peas, sprouts and potatoes I had brought up from Mogadishu.

'Boy,' Pip roared in a sudden rage. 'Mbuzi, mbuzi tena' (Goat, goat again), he said savagely. He picked up the joint and threw it at the boy, who dodged, running back into the kitchen.

'I've had goat for lunch and goat for dinner every day for the last six months,' he complained bitterly.

We ate the vegetables in silence.

Together with Haji Dif I saw him off the following morning early. Two of the dhow's crew had a 'huria', a small canoe, ready on the beach, into which he jumped. They pushed off and paddled him out to the dhow. He clambered aboard; the 'huria' was tied to the stern of the dhow, the sail was hoisted and slowly, tacking into the wind, they moved into the open sea. I watched it for several minutes and then briskly entered the office.

'Haji Dif,' I called, 'tell the sergeant that I want the platoon on parade at 7 o'clock for pay. They will be paid their back pay and given a new issue of uniform.'

'What about Illalos, sahib,' he queried.

I had forgotten about them. Looking through the handing-over notes

I saw that I also commanded forty Illalo irregulars (tribal scouts) whose job it was, apparently, to maintain a ceaseless watch along the coast-line for marauding enemy submarines which might well put in the many little coves and lagoons for fresh water. They also acted as lenders when I was out on patrol in the hinterland.

'They will be paid, too, after the Gendarmerie,' I said. 'Oh, and Haji, I don't want any "shauries" today, so you can tell all the notables hanging around the office that I will see them tomorrow morning.'

'O.K., sahib,' replied Haji salaaming. 'I'll tell the bastards.'

'Oh, and Haji, try not to use the word "bastard", it's not nice, and do try and cut down on the "O.K.s".'

'O.K., sahib,' he salaamed as he left the office.

It took me the best part of the day to pay out, withdraw the troops' old uniforms and issue the new ones. Came late afternoon and a big blow when I unpacked my kit. The obstinate hell-camel which had refused to get to his feet at Ras Shenegaf had got his own back on me for lighting a fire under his backside. He must have blundered into the cliff face overtaking the others, for my precious gramophone records were in pieces. I salvaged two only; one, Paul Robeson singing 'Lindy Lou', and on the reverse side, 'My Curly-headed Baby'. The other, 'I Dream of Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair' and 'Coming Through the Rye'.

The following day I saw the chiefs, Akils, notables and Mohamed Boghor, Sultan of the Isman Mohamed and hereditary chief of the Mijjertein. The first hour was spent in flowery compliments; there were about a dozen of them seated in a half-circle in the office facing me. They all told me what a splendid chap I was and although young was obviously blessed with great intelligence, wisdom and kindness.

Was I in good health?

'Yes, I am all right,' I replied in Somali before Haji Dif could get a word in. We smiled at each other with the eyes.

'Thanks to God,' said Sultan Mohamed Boghor, raising his arms and embracing the rest of the chiefs.

'Behold! we have a second Solomon!'

I lapped it up like a thirsty kitten then looked at Haji Dif, who winked at me.

The sultan then waved the rest of the notables out with a lordly gesture. Their shauries could wait. He drew his chair up nearer to my desk, had a hurried look behind him to see that the office door was closed and we were alone. He beckoned Haji Dif nearer. Plucking at his hennaed beard his eyelids drooped. He looked at me, weighing me up. Was I as stupid as I

looked? Yes, he thought I was, for he said craftily, 'The other sahib has now gone, he was a hard man and he did not understand us. There is a great injustice in the land but you, you,' he emphasised, leaning confidentially over my desk and tapping me on the arm with an eager forefinger, 'you are our mother and our father, you will see that these great injustices are righted and that peace comes back to us all.' Haji Dif interpreted this, coughed, smiled behind his hand and they both awaited my reply.

'What is this great injustice?' I asked innocently.

'The date gardens at Ghessili,' said the sultan, his eyes narrowing. He placed his left hand over his heart. 'For centuries they belonged to the Royal tribe, the Isman Mohamed, and then, through witchcraft and knavery the cursed Midgans took them over.' He fairly hissed the name Midgan. I had heard of the Midgans—Midgan means 'one hand'—and they are mostly, together with the Tomals, hunters, blacksmiths and agriculturists. They are known by their peculiarities of countenance, somewhat stunted figures and accent. They are looked down upon by the rest of the tribes, particularly the Royal Isman Mohamed, who scorn them as low-born serfs. They perform all the menial tasks the Somalis will not do themselves.

'Who planted the date palms?' I enquired.

'Allah knows,' replied the Sultan loftily.

The menial task of planting date palms was not for the Sultan of the Mijjertein to think about.

He looked disappointed.

'I will think well on your words,' I told him, 'and you shall have my reply within the week.'

'It is well,' he replied, 'and I know at last that justice will be done.'

We shook hands warmly. I returned his 'amana Allah, iyo rasulka' (Farewell) as he stalked out of the room.

'Bloody good, sahib,' said Haji Dif. He sucked in his moustache. 'What you going to do, eh?'

'Well, first, Haji, I must consult the files.'

Haji Dif clapped his hands and doubled up with mirth. 'Oh, sahib,' he said, 'oh, sahib.' He was still laughing when he left the office.

I had plenty to do the following days. I took the whole platoon, putting them through their paces on the rifle range and was gratified with the results. They were a credit to Pip. Their drill was impeccable, their turnout, in their new uniforms, spotless, and their behaviour exemplary. Nothing to worry about here, I thought.

Suddenly I remembered that it was a week to Christmas so I decided to

visit Cape Guardafui to see that things there were in order before the festivities.

To the north my district embraced the coastal villages of Durbo, Merhagno and Ghessili; to the south, Bereda, Damo and Tohen. From Tohen to Guardafui was a three hours' walk. East to the hinterland the Alula area joined with Iskushuban some 100 miles as the crow flies over an impenetrable mountain range.

'We go by dhow or walk, sahib?' asked Haji Dif when I told him to make preparations for our short safari to Cape Guardafui the following day. 'Dhow better, sahib,' he continued. 'One day to Bereda, second day to Damo and Tohen, then three-hour walk to bloody lighthouse. If we walk, three, mebbe four, days.'

'M'mm, we'd better go by dhow, Haji.'

'O.K., sahib,' said Haji, relieved. He obviously didn't want to walk it.

'You take askaris?'

'Yes, tell Sergeant Ali to have three askaris ready by first light.'

'O.K., sahib.'

The first thing I noticed on stepping out of the rocking 'huria' and clambering up into the dhow was the revolting smell. Haji Dif informed me that it had just been painted with fish liver to keep out the water and that its last voyage had been down to Mogadishu with a cargo of dried shark meat. The smell pervaded the whole dhow and from my couch, a carpet on the poop, the fetid odour came up in nauseous waves. We pulled up the anchor, hoisted sail and waited for a wind. We waited two hours. A contrary wind then caught the sail and we tacked into it only to be becalmed again way out to sea. We gently rose and fell on the glassy sea. Alula danced away to landward. The offensive waves of smell turned my stomach and I was sick. Hopelessly sick, as I retched away with my head hanging over the side of the dhow. I remained sick until we reached Tohen at about midday on the third day. I wanted to die. It was with infinite relief that my ordeal was over as I hurriedly jumped into the 'huria', nearly capsizing it in my anxiety to reach the shore.

I had eaten nothing during that short voyage by dhow and was grateful for Chief Musa Barre's hospitable gifts of camel's milk and fresh dates as he hurried to make us welcome. He promised us camels within the hour for our three-hour trek up to Cape Guardafui and I lounged under the date palms, idly eating dates and taking an appreciative swallow of milk. I felt miserable at my poor sailing qualities and thought that Haji Dif, Yusuf and my three gendarmes would think me a poor specimen. I mused bitterly that an ancestor of mine, the indefatigable Alexander

Davison, banker, close friend and confidant of the great Lord Nelson, would be turning in his grave.

The camels arrived and we started climbing through the dreary sand dunes, devoid of all life. Up and up until I could see the lofty grey tower, built high on a rocky promontory, stark against the blue sky, that was Cape Guardafui lighthouse. The perspiration poured from us as we climbed higher. I could now distinguish the giant axe and *fasces* built in stone on the south side of the building.

A wild-looking figure dressed in white shirt and shorts ran out of the lighthouse, down the slope to meet us. This, I thought, must be Carlo, the Italian lighthouse-keeper. Pip had given him an entire page all to himself in his handing-over notes.

'By profession a barber in Mogadishu. His business hadn't thrived and so had applied for and obtained the post of lighthouse-keeper at Guardafui. Drinks gin and grappa. Stationed at Guardafui for two years. Under the delusion that his three Somali assistants want him poisoned. Has a persecution mania. Speaks a little English. Only reason he stays on is to save up sufficient money to open up a barber's shop in Rome. To keep his hand in at hairdressing he catches his cockerel once a month and trims its head feathers. He's a bloody awful barber. Quite mad but harmless. Should be relieved.'

Carlo ran up to me.

'Tenente,' he said, 'Oh, Tenente.' He looked wildly around. 'Where is Tenente Peep?'

'Gone to Mogadishu,' I replied, introducing myself.

'Basta, finito,' he exclaimed dramatically, 'he has abandoned me.' He began to weep. He cried over the lighthouse, the sand, the Somalis, the poison, and his cockerel which wasn't too well, I gathered.

'Never mind, Carlo,' I soothed, 'I've brought some Cioffi gin with me and you can come back with me to Alula for Christmas, the change will do you good.'

He brightened up. 'Natale,' he said. 'Klistmas. I make ze spaghetti and ze dolchi and you make, how you say? ze ploom pudding.' 'That's right,' I agreed, 'straight out of a tin.' He was happy.

Walking into the lighthouse I spannered open the Cioffi. We each had a quick gin and whilst he bustled about preparing the spaghetti I interviewed and paid off the three Somali lighthouse assistants. I ascertained that they had sufficient fuel to keep the light going for another four months. Everything seemed to be in order. I cut short their complaints about Carlo.

That evening he talked incessantly. When he didn't talk he sang. Arias from *Aida*, *Carmen*, *Rigoletto* and *Faust*.

He told me that before the Fascists—he spat out the word Fascist (every Italian I met in Somalia was either a Monarchist or Communist and I never did meet one who openly admitted he was a Fascist)—built the lighthouse, which was most important on that lonely, treacherous coast, where the Somalis would light fires to the south and lure unwary ships on to the jagged rocks far below, killing all survivors and making off with what loot they could salvage.

The revolving light, high above us, lit up his room with sudden brilliance, now dark, now brilliant again in a measured, perpetual motion. The wind howled outside like a million demons at play. I had another gin for the lighthouse and fell asleep in my chair.

'Can I bring "bambino"?' he asked the following morning.

'Bambino?' I muttered, never at my best in the early hours. 'What the hell's bambino?'

'Ze cock,' he said.

The flipping cockerel. 'Oh, by all means,' I replied.

'Haji Dif,' I called. 'You can return to Alula with all the "kag"——' 'In the bloody dhow?' he interrupted.

'In the bloody dhow,' I agreed. 'I will take haversack rations and walk it with my three askaris.'

'Long way, sahib,' he said, sucking in his moustache. 'Take you three, mebbe four, days.'

To which I replied, 'I shall do it in two and a half. Now, Haji, listen and listen carefully. Take the lighthouse-keeper here with you and look after him. When you reach Alula—with a good wind you should be there just before me—I want you to prepare a cricket pitch, for on Christmas Day I want a game of cricket and I intend to teach all the askaris, the Illalos and the tribesmen the game. It will be good for them. It will teach them to play the game and all that sort of thing. Take their minds off squabbling about a lot of wretched water-holes and date gardens. Take that long mat out of my house, roll it out in the middle of the parade ground and peg it down, the perimeter of the parade ground will be the boundary. Get hold of the Government "fundi" and have him make wickets——'

'I know, sahib,' interrupted Haji surprisingly. 'Three wickets each end,' he gestured with his hand, 'so high.'

'You're a jewel, Haji,' I complimented him.

'I know "klicket", sahib,' said Haji. 'Bradman, Jack Hobbs, I been Australia too. Who best "klicketers", sahib, bloody Australians or Inglesi?'

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'The English,' I replied firmly.

'You going teach Sultan play?' he asked with a twinkle in his eye. 'I know, sahib, make him umpire.'

'Not on your life, Haji,' I said, setting out in good heart down the hill, followed in single file by my three askaris. We carried in our haversacks, dates and tinned meat, it would be tough going but I couldn't face that awful dhow again.

Passing through Tohen we reached Damo late that evening. Damo was just a cluster of sand-swept tents made of mats in which lived the desperately poor Suacron fisher-folk. Under the stars we hollowed out a hole in the sand and slept in our clothes. Bereda the next day, and then finally Alula.

It was Christmas Eve. I had blistered feet, a touch of the sun, was infinitely weary, but we had completed the long safari in under three days. The dhow party had arrived in only four hours ahead of us.

Christmas Day at Alula. Haji Dif told me that for a time he had been an assistant cook on an oil tanker and he'd give Yusuf a hand in preparing the Christmas dinner.

I warmed to him. Of the important Isshak tribe of British Somaliland, through his contact with Europeans over the years, he had become quite Westernised in his outlook on life and had lost that arrogance which so typifies the ordinary Somali. He would put his hand to anything. It speaks well of his character that he strictly adhered to the Mohammedan faith in that he neither smoked nor drank and usually led the evening prayers when out on safari.

Thanking him, I handed over the tinned turkey, packet of stuffing and the tinned plum pudding.

'You got brandy, sahib?' he asked. I nodded assent.

'I'll make brandy sauce with the bloody pudding then,' he said, disappearing into the kitchen.

Slipping out of my coloured 'lungi' I had a shower and dressed, putting on a cream shirt, club tie, cricket flannels and blazer.

Carlo was happy in the sitting-room. He had a bottle of grappa at his elbow and was listening entranced to the gramophone playing 'I Dream of Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair'. Descending the stone steps I walked out into the sunlight, strolling along the beach down to the village.

A Somali yero was sailing his home-made model dhow in one of the pools of water left behind by the receding tide.

Walking on I saw a Somali girl approaching. She was tall, beautifully proportioned, with the swaying, voluptuous walk they affected. I caught

a breath of myrrh as she passed, coyly covering up the lower part of her face with her coif but glancing at me with amused, provocative eyes as she went by. Unusual for a Somali girl, she wore a desert rose in her hair.

I looked back, so did she as her walk imperceptibly slowed down. Hurrying on to the village I wondered who she could be, for her revealing 'maro addi' was of an expensive cloth and her sandals of Arabic design, beautifully embroidered.

At the village well a woman from the hinterland in her travel-stained dress of a sandy-reddish colour was watering a small herd of he camels, crooning to them as she lowered the glistening leather goatskin bucket on a long length of camel rope into the depths, then expertly drawing it up, hand over hand, and flicking its contents into the trough. Her man, standing on one leg and leaning on his spear, was slowly polishing his teeth with the 'ado' stick.

I suddenly remembered that it was customary to present the troops with 'baksheesh' for Christmas, and nothing I knew would please them more than a meat camel.

I exchanged greetings with him.

'Imisa?' (How much?) I asked, prodding a sleek-looking camel in the belly with my forefinger.

He took the stick out of his mouth and spat.

'Laba bohol rupee,' he answered. He resumed cleaning his teeth. If he was surprised at seeing an apparition clad in full cricket regalia he did not show it.

Three hundred shillings. I was taken aback, for that represented a quarter of my monthly pay.

'Gel ken' (Bring it along), I agreed, turning and walking back to the house. He cut it out from the herd and followed me.

'Haji Dif, oh Haji,' I called. His face appeared at the upstairs kitchen window. He came down.

'A present for yourself and the troops. A present for Christmas. You can kill it tonight and have a feast,' I said.

'Ahsante, sahib, hilib badan ai-y--ee--ee' (Thank you, lots of meat, plenty of meat). He clasped his hands and salaamed.

'How much should I pay for him, Haji?'

He walked round the camel, reaching up and prodding the fat on his hump.

'One hundred rupees, sahib, no more.'

Entering the office, I unlocked the safe, taking out the required amount, then scribbling out my I.O.U. to balance the books.

The Somali accepted it and strode off after I had carefully counted it out into his hand.

He was evidently contented in getting half of what he had asked. I went upstairs. Carlo was still playing the same record. His bottle of grappa was half-empty.

'Who ees Jeanie?' he asked soulfully.

We sat down to dinner. The crackers were on the table. We pulled his and got a whistle. We then pulled mine and out dropped a hat. I opened it up. A red-paper job with a blue tassel on it. He looked disappointed. I gave it to him and he was happy.

In came Yusuf with the tinned turkey which had been lightly roasted and was served with balls of stuffing. The last of my vegetables, peas, sprouts, by now a bit withered, and roast potatoes. We scoffed the lot, Carlo licking his knife and fork in appreciation. Then came the *pièce de résistance*, prepared and brought in by Haji Dif himself: the Christmas pudding. Aflame with Old and Bold which burns better than any brandy I know of. Yusuf brought in the brandy sauce.

'Happy Klistmas,' said Haji. He hovered around the table.

'Thank you, Haji, and to you.' We piled in.

'How's the pudding? You like the bloody brandy sauce,' he asked anxiously.

'Excellent, Haji,' I replied in between mouthfuls. 'Just like Mother used to make. You're a genius. Don't forget the cricket at three o'clock.'

'All laid on, sahib. Wickets up, mat down. Klicket ground swept by Midgans. O.K.?'

This was not England, rural England in Nottinghamshire at Bestwood Park, with the smoke from the tall chimneys of the Hall curling lazily into the sky and the estate church clock chiming the hour. There was no verdant green grass to lie on nor the shady elm or oak to rest under. There were no foxgloves, dandelions, buttercups, or daisies, with butterflies flitting their aimless way among them.

There was no mown and rolled emerald sacred square for the wicket nor beyond in the surrounding woods the rhododendrons. Here the ripples of sand dunes danced in the heat haze and in the far distance was the smoky blue range of mountains.

Alula had not seen cricket before. Just about the whole village had turned out, although the game interfered with their afternoon's siesta.

The perimeter of the ground was a blaze of colour. The young warriors in their spotless white tobes, the girls and women in their brightly-coloured dresses. A cluster of grey-bearded chiefs and Akila were in one

corner, about eight of them all trying to shade under Sultan Mohamed Bogor's umbrella.

Away on the far side was a group of Arabs. Wild-looking men with long, matted black hair, kohl-fringed eyes, barefooted in their filthy stained gowns. They wore carved, silver-handled daggers in their girdles.

They were traders from over the Red Sea; from the Oman, Muscat and the Yemen, carried in their ocean-going dhows by the trade winds to barter their dates with the Somalis for incense, myrrh, aromatic gums, pearls, dried shark fins and the fat-tailed sheep of the Somali hinterland. Others had called in to water on their way farther south; to Mogadishu and Mombasa with their cargoes of brightly-coloured Persian carpets and rugs.

Yet another group comprised the stunted Midgans and Tomals, social outcasts in the class-conscious strata of Somali society.

Sinbad, the dimunitive punkah-wallah from the office, staggered along manfully behind me, carrying my leather bag of cricket gear. Idris Ibrahim, the clerk, who was to score, strolled up importantly with an exercise book and pencil.

On the improvised cricket field paraded the platoon of Gendarmerie, less the office guard, armed in their sections. Drawn up opposite them were the Illalos, the tribal scouts, in their serried ranks, also armed.

At Sergeant Ali Jama's word of command, they came to attention and sloped arms. The sergeant marched up to me and saluted. I raised my cricket cap and told him to order the men at ease and pile arms.

'Why in heaven's name did the troops bring their bang-sticks,' I enquired of Haji Dif. 'We're going to play a game, not fight a battle.'

'They just higgerent, sahib,' replied Haji.

Telling Sergeant Ali to choose ten gendarmes, including himself, which I would captain, I then turned to the corporal in charge of the Illalos, telling him to do the same. Carlo would captain the Illalo side. He didn't appear to be very enthusiastic.

Spinning a coin in front of him I said, 'Heads or tails?'

'Who ees Jeanie?' he asked dreamily. He was fargone.

Relegating him on the spot to vice-captain, I called over the Illalo corporal. Picking up a bat I said, 'This is called a bat. Think of it as a camel. Now when I throw it on the ground will the hump come up first or the flat belly?'

'Allah knows,' he replied gravely.

I gave up and put them in to bat.

Haji Dif was to umpire from both ends, being the only other chum present with a clue. He helped me to pad up the Illalos' two opening bats.

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The game began. I opened the bowling from the lagoon end, bowling three Illalos in my first over. Just like teaching them to shoot, I thought, hopeless to begin with then afterwards one has to look to one's own laurels to come out top. The next over was from the Bender Kassim end. Three wickets for no runs. As the gendarme prepared to bowl I noticed that the two fieldsmen I had carefully placed in the slips were holding hands, fingers interlaced, a Moslem custom between close friends.

'Umpire Dif,' I called, 'tell those two wets in the slips to wake up. How can they hope to catch the ball holding hands?' The two gendarmes sheepishly unlinked fingers and the game was resumed.

The bowler wouldn't or couldn't bring his arm over when he delivered the ball. He ran up with long, loping strides, stopped dead at the bowling crease and hurled the ball at the batsman. Used to spear throwing, the ball was delivered with remarkable velocity. Shades of Harold Larwood and body-line. The first three deliveries screamed past for four byes each. Three wickets for twelve runs. The Illalo batsman, by some freak, then connected with the fourth delivery and they began running. They ran five runs with none of the fielders bothering to chase the ball, which skidded to a stop in a patch of soft sand out past cover.

'Umpire Dif,' I shouted peevishly, 'tell the clots to chase the ball and return it to the bowler.'

Half-heartedly a gendarme complied with his instructions, threw the ball back to the bowler, then all my team seemed to go into a huddle in the middle of the wicket, stopping play.

'What's the matter now?' I called to Umpire Dif. Full of beer, turkey and Christmas pudding I was feeling a bit testy.

'They say, sahib, that they Mijjertein Somalis. They like defending themselves with the Inglesi spear and throwing the grenade at the enemy but they refuse to chase the bloody grenade after the enemy strikes it. They say that job for slaves, for Midgans.' I groaned. Class distinction was fast disappearing in England, but not in the Somalilands evidently.

I tried to argue with them but they were adamant. It's a question of caste, they said. There is only one thing for it, I thought. Prisoners. I put it to Haji Dif.

'How many chaps have we got in clink, Umpire?'

'Mebbe nine, mebbe ten, sahib,' replied Umpire Dif.

'Very well. Send a fast runner over to the jail and tell the prison warder I want all his prisoners here for cricket.'

Calling the two teams around me I endeavoured to explain to them the etiquette of the game. The sun seared down.

Ten prisoners were hustled up by their armed escort of three warders. The Gendarmerie fielders retired, and the prisoners, under protest, took their places in the field, anxiously watched over by the warders on the boundary.

'Mebbe better put pads on that mans, sahib,' said Umpire Dif, pointing to a fierce-looking Somali, looking wildly around him.

'He on remand for murder, knifed man dead at Ollok last week. Mebbe try and run away—not run far as wicket-keeper in pads. Rest just no-good bums, camel thieves—O.K.?'

'O.K.,' I replied.

'Game, two bloody balls to come,' said the umpire, bending professionally over the wicket.

The last two balls went through for byes again, the alleged murderer making little effort to stop the ball as it whizzed past him. I placed a long-stop on the boundary. Three wickets down for twenty-five runs. I bowled another Ilalo with the first ball of my over. He walked back to the pavilion, a small, stunted thorn tree, throwing a shade about the size of a small carpet. Four wickets down for twenty-five runs.

In came Carlo, slightly weaving.

He took his stance and aggressively flourished his bat. He hit my second ball for four and looked round for applause. There was none. The spectators were getting restive, dwindling away in twos and threes. A fastish ball this time which by some freak ran up the splice of his bat, striking him on the nose, which spurted blood in a steady trickle, staining the sand crimson. He threw down his bat, screaming, 'Berdio, cattivo, molto cattivo,' taking off for the house in a shambling run, holding his nose.

A loud 'Ah! ah!' went up from the spectators. The atmosphere was now tense. Those leaving the ground came streaming back. The greybeards all had their heads together. Everyone rose excitedly to their feet. So this was 'kriket'. They approved. First blood to the Gendarmerie. This, then, was the equivalent of their own mock battles, but without the women.

'Ah! ah! i dil!' screamed the warriors.

'Lululululu,' trilled the women.

Umpire Dif looked round disapprovingly. He might have been at Lord's.

The battle was joined.

A hit—three runs. The new batsman, a tall, well-made Illalo, twirled his bat over his head and looked aggressively about him. Short on the leg side. A mighty crack and a wretched prisoner, lazily scratching his navel, stopped the ball on his shin-bone and collapsed.

He was carried off. The batsmen ran three.

The applause and screams were now terrific. The warriors on the boundary leapt stiff-legged, high in the air, coughing out their war cries and brandishing their spears. They looked as though they might invade the ground and join in at any minute. The Arab traders fingered their silver-handled daggers. Sultan Mohamed Bogor excitedly waved his fly-whisk.

The last ball of my over. I ran up to the wicket, wet with perspiration, my shirt clinging lovingly to my back. A rap on the pads. I appealed. Umpire Dif's finger shot up.

'Out, by God,' he said. The Illalo stood his ground, puzzled. 'Out,' said Umpire Dif again. 'Leg before the bloody wicket. Isskatag' (Go).

He went. The game progressed, the Illalos being all out for fifty-seven runs without further casualties.

Just after 5.30 p.m. I opened the Gendarmerie innings with Sergeant Ali. The opening bowler bounded gracefully up to the wicket, stopped and hurled the ball at my head. I ducked, swung, the ball connected in the meat of the bat and hurtled to the boundary scattering Sultan Mohamed Bogor and the rest of the ancients.

Hysterical animal noises came from the few Midgans and Tomals from the other side of the ground. The Sultan scowled. The second ball whizzed viciously past my ear for four byes. The third ball was short of a length, it hit a stone under the mat and struck me on the chest. I staggered. The crowd went wild.

The fourth ball I pulled out of the ground for six and the fifth I drove hard back to the bowler, who doubled up with pain, but incredibly enough held the ball to his stomach. A perfect caught and bowled. One wicket for fourteen runs.

Walking up to the bowler I clapped him on the shoulder. He grimaced his pleasure as Umpire Dif handed me my blazer. Walking back to the thorn-tree pavilion a herd of sheep and goats invaded the pitch, holding up the game for a few minutes. The flaming sun hung suspended above the sea, then slowly dipped into the grey waves.

Four more byes from the last ball of the over the Sergeant Ali faced the bowling. Ones and twos off the edge of the bat, then his wicket shattered. He strode off, giving the jubilant bowler a disdainful look.

A procession now as the bowlers took command, their bowling, or rather throwing, being hostile and accurate. Most of the runs came from byes and seven wickets were soon down for forty-five runs. The score crept along with another wicket falling. Eight for fifty. A pie-dog then

ran off with the ball, which was retrieved by the office punkah-wallah, Sinbad. A solitary gull winged overhead. Another wicket: nine for fifty-three.

The moon came out as the last man came in. He had his pads on upside down. He faced a hostile bowler on a bumping pitch with the stars now appearing one by one overhead.

I couldn't follow the flight of the ball as it whistled past him for the usual four byes, chased by a tired, perspiring prisoner.

The score was even.

A rap on the pads and an appeal. 'Out,' said Umpire Dif, pocketing the bails, suddenly remembering the camel I had presented to them and which had yet to be killed. 'Kriket' was all very well but the succulent meat from a camel much better. The match was drawn. This game was the forerunner to a match played every Saturday for over a year except when I was called out to settle a tribal dispute or when I made my routine visits to Cape Guardafui lighthouse.

Returning to the house, Carlo was not in evidence. I knocked on his door; it was locked. He was sulking. I left him to it. Tired after the game I had a drink, dinner, and went to bed.

The rays of the sun were already streaming into my room when I awoke. Calling for breakfast, I asked for Carlo.

'Gone, sahib,' said Haji Dif. 'He caught fast dhow for lighthouse early this morning.' That was the last I saw of Carlo for a month.

Several days later in the office Haji Dif coughed nervously as I was balancing my books with the cash on hand in the safe.

'Sahib.' He sucked in his moustache. 'The chiefs, Akils and headmen are all outside and they want you to choose.'

'Choose? Choose? What the devil do you mean choose, Haji. Choose what?' I was a little flustered as I appeared to be a few hundred rupees short in the kitty.

Haji looked sly and a little nervous.

'They want you to choose one of their girls, sahib. All the Italian Residentes did; it is the custom.' He coughed, and looked at me encouragingly. I had not bothered much with girls in my twenty-two years. Before the war cricket had been my passion in England and during the long winter months I had been busy swotting for my surveyor's examinations. With the outbreak of war a few months' square bashing in the ranks and then to the Officer Cadet Training Unit followed by France, Ireland and now Africa. I'd had little time for poodle-faking. There had been a girl in Arnold—but that seemed a thousand years ago. Here at

Alula I'd plenty to do and was terribly keen and enthusiastic on my job. No, a girl didn't seem to fit into the scheme of things at all. I wasn't interested—now.

I remembered the wretched subaltern at Jelib who had fallen for one of the local Somali beauties and during the long, lonely nights had been maddened by her inexorable insistence that he showed preference to her tribe over the grazing rights. Night after night, she had withheld those ecstatic, rapturous arts of love she knew so well and of which he had tasted. In the end, maddened by a frenzy of desire for her bewitching body, he gave in.

In the inevitable tribal fight which followed, twenty-eight tribesmen were killed, and in this fierce encounter he unluckily escaped with his life to be summoned to Mogadishu, there to undergo the agony of disgrace and loss of rank. He shot himself, south of Mogadishu in the middle of the lonely bush.

Through the open door outside I could see the flag, lazily stirring in the morning breeze; a shaft of sunlight filtered through the window behind me flickering over the desk on which my blue forage cap rested, with the regimental badge worked in gold thread.

I felt very young and unsure of myself.

'Haji Dif,' I spoke slowly, my mind made up. 'You'd better bring them in.'

They stood in the office with Sultan Mohamed Boghor seated in the chair I had Haji place for him. They looked wiser than time itself with their eyes darting over me, speculative and veiled with the cunning in their hearts. 'Ilah dad o dan wa u wanaksanyahai' (God is good to all), spoke up Sultan Mohamed Bogor sententiously. He gave a soft, encouraging cough. To which I replied haltingly, 'Wahha ad madahhaga iyo aloshada ku haisata wa garta' (He knows everything you have in your head and your heart).

That shook them. Sultan Mohamed Boghor smiled.

'Haji Dif. Thank them every one for the honour they do me. I have searched my heart which answers that I cannot accept that which they offer. They must understand that the Inglesi does not love lightly but that when he does love then it is for ever.'

He translated. I could not read their impassive faces as they salaamed and walked out. The Sultan remained seated.

'For one so young you are full of wisdom,' he said. 'Have you thought further on the question of the date gardens at Ghesseli?'

'Yes. Tell him, Haji, that I have looked up the files which go back to the

time of the Italians to which there is a memorandum written by the sahib who had just left and by the Provincial Commissioner Sahib for the whole of the Mijjertein who is at Gardo. They both agree that as the Midgans planted the date trees many years ago then the gardens must belong to them and not to the Isman Mohamed who are stock-owners and not agriculturists.

I find no reason to disagree with their decision and as far as I'm concerned the matter is now closed.'

There was a pregnant silence. Mohamed Boghor fingered the rosary around his neck.

'There will be trouble,' he scowled. He stalked out of the office.

I loved the life at Alula and only occasionally found the loneliness irksome, but when some two or three times a month the large ocean-going liners steamed majestically by close inshore civilisation and the rest of the world did not seem so far away.

The days passed into weeks and the weeks into months. I found plenty to occupy my time doing routine jobs, like dashing out to some isolated water-hole and settling the inevitable tribal fights over the precious water, or arbitrating in some quarrel over the ownership of an incense tree. These trees are owned tribally down to clans, families and even individuals, and woe betide the transgressor who endeavours to tap the tree of his neighbour. The Mijjertein Somalis are quick to anger, violent and eager to use their double-edged fighting knives when aroused.

The Isman Mohamed claim for ownership of the date gardens at Ghessili appeared to have died a natural death.

The really hot months preceding the kherif made it unpleasant to drill, or take the troops in field training, so during the lazy afternoons I would join the Suacron in shark catching. They called the shark the 'libah baded', the sea lion, and had evolved a simple system over the years of catching and killing this wicked-looking lion of the sea. Three of us would go out in a 'huria' and for bait would troll a large lump of rotting fish on a stout steel hook. As soon as the shark had taken the bait he was hauled close in to the canoe and despatched with a hatchet. A few blows expertly delivered to the brain soon stopped his frantic, wild thrashings. One such afternoon I was out with the one-eyed Mohamed and his inseparable fishing companion Abdi, both Suacron. We hooked a monster. The frail canoe pitched alarmingly. The thin steel hawser connecting the hook to the rope-line snapped and, coming up from underneath us in a vengeful attack, the shark overturned the canoe. He made for Abdi in a flash. In one snap he bit quite cleanly through his thigh close up to the body. Two

more canoes came to our rescue and he was driven off, but not before Abdi had died as we reached the shore half-drowned and frightened at the suddenness of the tragedy.

Haji Dif fussed about me like an old hen. 'Too bloody dangerous, sahib,' he kept saying. 'Next week we go shoot "arrigas" with Midgans.' This involved a four-day trip through the mountains and on to the hidden plains behond them.We took a donkey with us and when we had located a small herd of oryx the Midgans skilfully painted the donkey with a black and white blaze on the face and black markings on his legs. A pair of oryx horns were then securely tied to his head. The decoy was released with the Midgans in ambush, armed with their bows and poisoned arrows. Their bows were bent pieces of wood from the 'Mangab' tree, with gut for string. They carried slung quivers made of wood with gerenuk hide sewed round them. To the quiver was attached a knife in a sheath, a stone for sharpening arrow-barbs and a pointed tool for mending sandals. Their arrows had a barbed-wire head and under the barb the poison was stuck like black glue.

The wary but curious oryx approached and a fine buck was despatched as the three Midgan hunters with us got off their arrows at a range of about thirty yards. All three were in the heart region.

Six long months had passed and we were now approaching the 'haggai', the hot summer season. For the past few nights the kherif had moaned through the land with its eerie whine and by day its scorching wind lashed across my body like a flame. In another fortnight it would be at its worst.

One lazy, hot afternoon I had a squad of Gendarmerie on the flat roof of the house engaged in stripping and assembling the Breda light machine gun, when a wildly excited Illalo came rushing up to the sentry. From his almost incoherent chattering, I gathered the incredible news that a large party of Europeans were approaching along the southern shore.

This, I thought, is it. This was the moment I had been waiting for throughout those long days and longer lonely nights.

A large party of Europeans could, I thought, mean only one thing—a party landed from a hostile submarine, for the Japanese were known to be operating in these waters far from their bases. In the whole of this Mijjertein Province, approximate in size to the British Isles, I knew that our entire British personnel consisted of less than a dozen officers from five widely spaced outposts and so this alternative possibility could be ruled out. I feverishly assembled the Breda in record time, placed it on the

battlemented walls and scanned the coast with my glasses for what I hoped would be a large, well-armed raiding party. I saw, half a mile away, several almost naked souls staggering along the beach. My 'raiding party' turned out to be half the crew of the Norwegian oil tanker *Belita* which had been torpedoed off Socotra two days previously. They had vainly tried to reach Socotra but the strong currents had swept them over to the African mainland and they had landed five miles south of Guardafui in one of their lifeboats. They had left their sinking ship with scant provisions as the submarine had shelled them and they were in an exhausted state. Some of them were wounded. They had parted company with their second boat containing the first mate and the remainder of the crew, and could give me no news of it. I bedded them down, putting Captain Scacht, their Norwegian skipper, a man of about seventy, in my own bed, had the Somali dresser clean and bandage their wounds then had rough shirts and shorts made for them from locally bought cloth. I made an improvised kitchen, bought up the scant stocks of tea and sugar from the native dukas and sent off an Illalo runner to my nearest neighbour at Bendir Kassim, some 100 miles to the north, who had wireless, asking him to get through to the naval authorities at Aden to send a relief ship with provisions, blankets and clothing.

The second lifeboat was still missing, but there was a possibility that the remainder of the crew had managed to reach the 'Two Brothers', two small islands roughly in between Socotra Island and the mainland. It was with foreboding that I instructed Haji Dif to have a dhow made ready for a search.

He protested vehemently that it was too dangerous with the kherif now blowing at full strength, that the seas in this region, with their treacherous currents, were notoriously dangerous to ocean-going liners let alone a forty-ton dhow. My mind was made up, for there was no alternative, and as I boarded the dhow the familiar stench of rotting shark meat met me in waves. I was sick almost as soon as I boarded her.

Haji Dif made a last effort to dissuade me from the voyage, backed up by the nakhoda of the dhow, who was very loath to go. Telling Haji to look after the survivors to the best of his ability we pulled up the anchor, the dhow heeled over as the kherif filled her sail and we were off. A nightmare of a voyage followed that evening although we made good time with the strong kherif wind filling our billowing sail. The next day we reached the islands, only to be bitterly disappointed in finding them devoid of human life. Sea-birds rose in their tens of thousands in indignation of this violation of their sanctuary.

There was nothing for it but to make the return journey. I was sick constantly. With the kherif against us the stoutly built dhow tacked into the shrieking wind, shuddered and shipped water badly. The protective strip of coconut matting lashed round her upper structure to form an additional protection against the higher waves was torn off and the crew bailed for life. I was shagged with fear. It was touch and go for she almost foundered. All this time the nakhoda, hanging grimly on to the rudder, was invoking aid from Allah and I echoed fervently his 'Ilah Dad o dan wa u Wanaksanyahai' (God is good to all), for with the dawn the wind seemed to lessen and the low coast-line just north of Cape Guardafui came into view, with the revolving light twinkling high above the jagged cliffs. Thankfully I climbed out of the pitching dhow and into the small huria, finally breasting through the surf, then wearily walking along the beach to Alula, about twelve miles away. The nakhoda and crew would tack along the coast for sanctuary and anchorage in the Alula lagoon. On my return, tired and needing sleep badly, I learnt that the other boat with its full complement had been carried north of Alula by the currents near a headland called 'Bolimoch' (Elephant's Head), had beached safely and all the crew were now at Alula. I slept. The next day I realised that our plight at Alula was not too happy. My own army rations had long since finished. Twenty-two into one does not go. Fish were very hard to come by if not unobtainable at this time of the year, but I sent half a dozen sailors to the near-by lagoon to try their hands with a couple of the local Suacron to help. We had dates, but even so rationing would be necessary, for Pip had told me of the previous year at Alula when malnutrition through lack of food had caused the deaths of many villagers and it was only the timely arrival of a Government-hired dhow up from Mogadishu with grain and rice aboard which had saved many more lives.

The hinterland Somali can always live off his stock but here on the coast is the constant threat of starvation: particularly so if a bad fishing season coincides with a poor date harvest. Twelve days passed. We had been existing on dates, a few fish, mostly sardines and tinned tunny which I had obtained from Caramelli's deserted fishing factory just north of Alula. The Custodian of Enemy Property sitting on his backside in Mogadishu could sort that one out afterwards.

The following day a nomad weaved his way across the beach into Alula with a chit tied to the haft of his spear from the Political Officer, Bendir Kassim, in which he said that Aden had been notified and I could expect help almost any day. Another long week went by and mutiny almost reared its ugly head, for a group of sailors accused the captain,

first mate and myself of hoarding rations and faring better than they. I invited six of them to join us at dinner that evening from their own mess, the hospital, which I had converted for them. They solemnly sat down. On came the dates and tinned tunny. My stocks of tea and coffee had finished days ago. Yusuf said afterwards that one of them had scrounged round my bare kitchen. They were profuse in their apologies the next day. Four more long days and then a smudge of smoke was seen on the horizon which rapidly grew nearer and H.M.S. *Romney* steamed in and anchored off shore.

We got the shipwrecked crew aboard. I was treated with true naval hospitality. I heard the war news.

The captain instructed his quartermaster to give me fresh potatoes, tinned stuff and a bottle of Scotch, together with a bag containing six hundred rupees to pay for sundry expenses incurred in looking after the *Belita's* crew.

It was a very happy sahib and Haji Dif who climbed down the sides of the destroyer. Haji clutched the bag of rupees whilst I clutched the precious bottle of Scotch as we were paddled back to Alula and solitude.

That night the house seemed very empty as the eerie kherif whistled through the shutters. I reached for the whisky.

I had intended to ration myself to a tot a night and the bottle should have lasted a month, but an indefinable something caused me to drink steadily into the night until the bottle was finished. I was well and truly drunk when just about midnight there came a knock on the door and in walked Haji Dif. A cockroach scuttled across the floor.

I threw the empty whisky bottle at it.

'Oh, sahib,' he said reproachfully. 'You drunk.'

I looked at him glassily.

'Yes,' I replied, 'I'm bloody well tight. Well, what do you want, Haji? what's the griff?' Had I been sober I would have seen that he looked ill at ease; the mere fact that he had called to see me at this late hour foretold something of the utmost importance.

'The griff is bad, sahib—bloody bad,' said Haji. He looked close to tears. I sobered up a little.

'Well, sit down,' I said. 'Give me the griff.'

'Oh, no, sahib, it wouldn't do,' replied Haji with dignity. He remained standing.

There was silence.

Silence, except for the kherif which mournfully howled outside. One of the window shutters, riddled with dry rot and neglect, gave up the

unequal struggle against the outside elements, falling on the floor with a crash; the pressure lamp flared up and went out. We were in darkness except for a lonely moonbeam which filtered in through the open window. For a fleeting second it played over Haji Dif's sombre face.

'Out with it, Haji,' I wheedled. 'What is it?'

I beckoned again to the chair and he sat opposite me with a dignified word of thanks.

'They say, sahib—they say that you make love with Sinbad.' He spoke slowly, almost wearily.

My befuddled wits would not cope and then suddenly the light dawned. It sobered me. I was shagged with anger.

'Repeat again what you just said, Haji'—my brain was racing round and round like a clockwork train and my head felt as though it would explode.

'They say, sahib, that you make love with Sinbad,' he repeated.

Sinbad, the office punkah-wallah, the grubby little Somali yero.

It was fantastic.

I seemed as though I was in the middle of a bad nightmare.

To hell my old boots, I thought. But it wasn't a question of to hell my old boots, it was a question of to hell the office toto.

The lonely star of sodomy had never interested me. I laughed drunkenly, for I suddenly remembered a grandfather of mine who had served in the Indian army for many years. Ostracised by all the family he had squandered away quite a sizeable fortune in India, Canada, then Rio de Janeiro on slow horses and very fast dingbats. I now remembered his coming to my parents' home, uninvited, an imposing figure of a man for all his seventy years, tall and handsome with a great hooked nose. I doted on him and slipped away whenever I could to the little cottage in Sherwood to see him. I remembered him now coming through the front door singing lustily the old Pathan love song—'There is a boy across the river with a bottom like a peach, but alas I cannot swim.' There was more to it but Mother bundled me out of the room and upstairs to bed. My grandfather, who had been a real soldier of the Queen, one of the old school. A man's man if ever there was one. He sang the song for devilment and in defiance of all the so-called proprieties of life. I had remembered it as a joke, one of the family skeletons in the dusty cupboard of years, but it was no joke now.

'Who started this rumour, Haji? Who thinks this of me? Why? Why? Why?' I beat the table top with my clenched fist in desperation. 'Do I not shoot better than any of my askaris? Did I not walk Ibrahim, Hussein and

Elmi off their feet from the lighthouse? Am I not a man in the eyes of the Somalis?'

Haji spoke slowly and with compassion.

'You no understand the Somalis, sahib, or their——' he fumbled for words. 'Mentality?' I asked. 'Yes, sahib, that's it. If you don't have womans they think you do something else. Something bad. When you refuse a girl months ago they then start griff.' 'Who started the griff?' I asked. But I knew. I then knew how cunning the old Sultan really was. How he hoped to get rid of me this way, and get someone more pliable at Alula, for if this rumour was not scotched, and that quickly, I would be finished.

'Mohamed Boghor,' said Haji as I knew he would.

'Do the askaris think this, do you, Haji?'

'No, sahib,' he said stoutly. 'I know the Inglesi, and I know you, sahib.'

We were silent.

The wind outside kept our thoughts company and slowly, very slowly, blew away the cobwebs. The burnt-out pressure lamp rhythmetically swung to and fro like the pendulum of a clock.

'There's only one thing for it, Haji—I must get a girl.'

'Yes, sahib, yes,' he replied eagerly.

My mind went back over the months. During the long, lonely nights I had thought of her. Of her swaying, seductive walk, her generous breasts beneath the revealing 'maro addi', of the provocative look she gave me as she walked past me on the beach the day I bought the camel for the troops.

'There is a girl,' I said dreamily. 'I first saw her six months or so ago on the beach. Unmarried, for she wears her head uncovered. She is tall and her clothes are expensive. She wears Arabic sandals and a desert rose——'

'Ebbaiyow' (O my God), exclaimed Haji, jumping to his feet. 'Amiina, the Jiradah (Princess). She young daughter of the Sultan. Amiina Boghor. No, sahib. She most engaged to Abdi Hassan Mursal, the son of Sheik Abdurrahman Mursal of the Ali Suleiman. He 'ready paid part of the "yarad" (bride price). Oh, no, sahib. Trouble, much trouble.'

Obstinately I wouldn't listen to him.

'If I have to have a girl, Haji, it is to be Amiina or no one else. I won't have any old crumpet the tribes want to foster on me. Now be a good chap, get in touch with her and arrange a meeting-place.'

I was too far gone to realise the implications of such a union, for this would put me completely in Mohamed Boghor's clutches. He would have me by the short hairs so to speak. Haji submitted to my request, though with a bad grace, as he salaamed and went out shaking his head.

Three days went by, then at midday on the Friday as I was preparing to

leave the office Haji came in. At a look from him, Sinbad, the punkah-wallah, let go of the camel rope he was gently pulling and scuttled outside.

Haji said simply, 'She meet you at lagoon at sunset, sahib,' shook his head disapprovingly and walked out of the office.

The sun was just setting when I left the house and as its flaming orb seemingly dipped into the vastness of the ocean a long black cloud of thousands of cormorants, stretching as far as the eye could see, winged their way to Bolimoch, the rocky promontory that was their home, now silhouetted in bold relief against the clear evening sky.

I walked barefooted along the shore to the blue lagoon, about half a mile to the south, clad in my lungi with my shirt worn outside in Somali fashion. It was the hour for prayer. I heard the muezzin calling from the four corners of the village mosque the familiar 'Allah Akbar, Allah Akbar, La Allah, Il Allah, La Allah, Il Allah, U Mohamed Rassul Allah (God is great, there is no God but God and Mohammed is the Prophet of God). A quickening breeze whipped up little swirls of sand as I passed.

An old, grey-headed Suacron fisherman, his net thrown over his shoulder and carrying several silver fish threaded on a line, gave me the traditional Mussulman salutation of 'Alikam Asalam'. I returned his To you be peace, salaam, as he trudged homewards.

The beach was now deserted.

I approached the nodding date palms fringing the lagoon with the surf pounding in unison to my wild heart-beats and the thrill of desire that was in me ran like a white-hot fire through my body. A thousand thoughts crashed through my mind and all my inhibitions of the past lonely nights welled up in my throat and choked me with the familiar ache of frustrated longing.

It was then that I saw her.

Taller than I, she stood looking out to sea with her back to the prow of a gaily-painted dhow careened on its side. Motionless, as if she were the dhow's figurehead.

I approached nearer, walking noiselessly on the soft sand.

Her coiffure was partly disarranged and the imprisoned long black hair, as though impatient to escape, had cascaded to her shoulders. A single desert rose crimsoned behind her ear, matching the colour of her lips and enhancing the dark vivid beauty of her face.

Playfully the freshening kherif caressed her one-piece dress which was knotted over the right shoulder and girdled round the waist so that it clung to her lissom body, outlining the generous rounded breasts, the superb thighs and long, slim legs.

Time stood still as I drank in the beauty of her.

With a quick, startled motion she must have sensed my presence for she suddenly turned and saw me. As I walked up to her she swept a coloured head-dress over the lower part of her face so that I was confronted by two gold, slanted, kohl-rimmed eyes, which stared steadily at me. I was tongue-tied and neither of us spoke for seconds.

Her eyes then brimmed with laughter and she broke a long silence by saying provocatively, 'Nabat, Abdi Melik, so dowow (come near). Did'st the Galgail cut out thy tongue then?'

'Nay, Amiina, and why dost thou hide thine?' I ventured, gently removing the yashmak from her face, catching an elusive, fragrant scent of myrrh as I did so.

We both laughed.

She had the Mijjertein Somali's aristocratic aquiline nose, a generous mouth and flawless, even teeth revealing the dark gloss of her gums. An amber bead necklace encircled her neck.

'Come sit thee down,' I said. 'Now tell me why dost thou call me Abdi Melik, and what dost thou know of the Galgail?'

'Everyone calls thee Abdi Melik, which is thy Somali name, and dost not all the Somali tribes throughout the land know of thy fight with the Galgail and how thee seized their camels in hundreds,' she replied admiringly.

Somali flattery perhaps, but her honeyed tongue was as music to my ears and a balmy sedative which assuaged my lonely heart.

'How many years art thou?' I asked.

'Seventeen, and thou?'

'Twenty-two.'

'Art thou married?'

'Nay.'

'And thou?'

'Nay.'

'It is well, Abdi Melik. Knowest thou that I am a 'Jiradah' (Princess). My father is Mohamed Boghor, Sultan of the Mijjertein, and that his camel herds are countless, his cattle are fat and his sheep and goats are as many as the stars in the heaven yonder.' Here she pointed a shapely, rounded arm to the galaxy of stars above us.

'Knowest thou also that this dhow is his, aye and others like it at Bendir Kassim, Ollok, and Hafun?'

She lay back, resting her head on the side of the dhow, glancing at me sensuously through half-lowered eyelids.

Tracing a pattern in the sand with her finger she began to sing a 'balwo', a lyrical Somali love-poem. It had a distinct tune with a syncopated rhythm and it was with difficulty that I caught the words as she softly sang them:

'If I set myself to write
Of the love that holds my heart
A wondrous great 'kitab' (book)
Could not contain it all.

I long for thee as one
Whose dhow in the kherif
Is blown adrift and lost
In the grey and empty sea.

The curving of my breasts
Like apples sweet and small
Are thine to caress
When night turns dusk to dark.

Then lay between these breasts
And call thy life fulfilled,
And never be denied
This well of happiness.'

'Abdi Melik,' she asked imperiously after a pause. 'How dost the Inglesi make love?'

I gasped with desire, then gently eased her forward and in so doing the top of her dress loosened, exposing her breasts which rose and fell like twin cupolas to her eager breathing.

Our two hearts hammered together as I murmured, 'With kisses, thus and thus.' I kissed first the tip of her left breast, next the right one, then transferred my mouth to hers which opened with all its fresh moistness at my eager questing. Her eyes widened, then grew dark under my caresses. I was lost. Love-lost in the fragrant ambrosial scent and voluptuousness of her as we impetuously loved on the beach.

How long we lay there I do not know for time was endless. It meant nothing in an ecstasy such as this. Screened by the dhow, the kherif mourned its loneliness to the outside world. I lost my own loneliness. Lost it deep buried in the open well of her mouth as my kisses rained in there.

Amiina herself broke the spell by whispering, 'War, Abdi Melik, awa wa addo' (Oh, how the moon shines), and then kissing me passionately, 'Oh my God, I love thee'.

Drunk with happiness, I replied with a long, slow kiss, 'I love thee too, Amiina'.

The brilliant moon now riding high above bathed us both in her friendly light. Drawing my lungi over us we slept, lulled to sleep by the trade winds whispering in the palms, and the incessant breaking of the surf.

All too soon from the Suacron fishing village behind us a cock-crow heralded the false dawn and Amiina stirred sleepily in my arms.

'Abdi Melik,' she whispered, 'I si, I si' (give me, give me).

Her lips parted and her kisses infused me with a passion more than I could bear, soon, too soon to be extinguished as love itself rested.

Urgently now the cock crowed its strident reveille again. The sun's first blush peeped above the sea. Pulling Amiina protestingly to her feet I stripped in a second whilst she disrobed, letting fall her shift as she looked shyly at me, a bronze aphrodite.

Hand in hand we ran to the sea, splashing through the shallows and surf, then swimming on to a wrecked dhow where we rested, panting with exhilaration and laughing with the joy of being young and in love.

'Ahalki an tagno' (let us return), I smiled at her.

'Edinku sidas shada, eg! wainu ta-gaina' (Say ye so? lo, we go), she laughed, diving in the shining waves and heading for the beach.

We dressed quickly and ran up to the house, past the astonished sentry, who gave me a belated butt salute as we went by, and so began my love affair with Amiina. During these ecstatic nights I would teach her English, giving her simple exercises to do whilst I worked in the office by day.

From Amiina I learnt much of the folk-lore of the Somalis; that the legendary figures of the Somali race, Darod and Isshak, came from Arabia, and she herself claimed to be able to trace her ancestry to these Arabian aristocrats. Amiina possessed all the physical beauty rhapsodied by the younger set of advanced Somali poets in their short love-poems, the 'belwo'. A poet will often write some of his best 'belwo' to an unapproachable beauty knowing that his love for her is hopeless—perhaps because of his financial standing or because of his inferior tribe. He would base his romantic love on the curve of a breast or the flicker of an eyelash.

These Somali love-poems are mostly of physical love, passionate and sincere. It is not done to use vulgar expressions, thereby offending public

taste. It must be remembered that poetry requires no special materials nor carrying space other than the talent of the composer, which is carried in his memory. Since the Somali is continually moving his tents in the search for grazing and water this is important, for he must carry as little equipment as possible on his burden camels. Also poetry costs nothing —quite a factor to the nomadic Somali in his insecure and poor life.

Generally, marriages are not undertaken lightly by Somalis and are mostly arranged by the parents with a view to mutual financial advantages. The arrangements are complex and are decided upon by the man concerned, the girl's father and also the tribal Akils or elders. Much must be arranged and then settled; the bride-price ('yarad'), the token payment made ('gabati') by the man on his engagement and the percentage he has to find of his estate, the 'mehr', which is made out to his wife on marriage. A dowry, or ('dibat') is given to the couple by the bride's family.

Usually the girl before marriage is gentle and very beautiful, but after marriage, like her European sister, she generally develops into a shrew, becoming irritable and a nagger. The reason for this is that her position is caused by economic necessity as well as tradition. Her status is decidedly inferior to that of man. For this reason I think many Somali women prefer European amourettes, for unlike the Somali, who if he treated his wife with unusual thoughtfulness, would be laughed at by the rest of his tribe, the European would show her that kindness and consideration he normally shows to his own women, to which the Somali girl is unaccustomed.

And so it was with Amiina and myself, for in my love-making I showed her all the gentle intimacies of love without the lustful passion she alone would have known otherwise.

During the long evenings I took delight in composing poems to her, as close to the Somali 'balwo' as I could get, and in one of them I described her charms:

'As lovely as a dhow at sea
Thy young beauty is to me,
Tall, with all the gerenuk's grace,
A daughter of the Darod race.

Black hair, fine as gossamer thread,
Eyes that speak of things unsaid
High cheek-bones with straight nose
On thy mouth—the desert rose.

Teeth as white as the 'lul'
  Hidden in its secret pool,
Dark shining gums, cheek copper-lush,
  Beautiful as the desert's blush.

With rounded neck, arms and hips
  You sway your form like the desert ships
And when the sun unveils its light
  I long again for the approach of night.

Twin breasts; neither large nor small
  Supporting nipples, too proud to fall,
At the touch a little wide,
  Allah keep them in their pride.

Long-limbed, your thighs a dream,
  I have a 'djinn' for it. would seem
I cannot sleep, Amiina,
  These nights in Paradise.

The months now flew by as she accompanied me on my safaris. Safaris of absolute happiness, north along the coast by leisurely camel caravan. To Bereda, Ollok and Damo, the little Suacron fishing villages nestling in the dunes with the Indian Ocean sparkling sapphire blue beneath us. We explored a cave there which Amiina called 'Godka Darod' (Darod's Cave), and one late afternoon, sipping close-scented tea underneath the date palms, she told me the full story of her tribe, the Isman Mohamed, who she claimed were descended from Darod, an Arabian nobleman, and how one day the young Darod was invited to a great feast given by his uncle, the Sultan. When the guests had assembled the young Darod came to the palace, hesitated and refused to enter. The Sultan was angry that his nephew, just a boy, refused his hospitality. He questioned Darod about it.

'The meat which is prepared for your feast,' Darod said, 'has been prepared by a woman who is unclean, and the sheep from which the meat was taken has something of human flesh about it. I dare not eat, oh Sultan.'

The Sultan then summoned all the women of his house and asked them to explain the boy's words. They would all be executed at once, he said, if they refrained from telling the truth. All the women were afraid and

looked at one another, but none came forward to explain Darod's words. At length the Sultan's mother came forward and told the truth.

She herself was in her monthly sickness and had prepared the meat for the feast. As for the sheep having something of human flesh about it, at the time when the sheep was a lamb, its mother had died in the drought, and there was no milk for it. The woman who herded the flocks had just borne a child, so she suckled the small lamb from her breast.

'When the Sultan heard the woman's words he was astonished and became alarmed at Darod's powers of vision and feared lest his throne be taken away from him by the boy.

'And so it came about that the sultan plotted to kill the young Darod. This news came to the ears of the boy's father and he feared for his son's life. He called his four eldest sons to him, and instructed them to take a dhow, put in sufficient food and water for a month and to take the young Darod in the dhow to the coast of the strange land opposite the Arabian shore which they called the Land of Punt.

'Thus it came to pass that a dhow was loaded with fresh water and sheep and in the dhow the four sons of Darod's father set out with their young brother Darod.

'When they reached the Land of Punt opposite, Darod's four brothers told him that they would all go ashore for a few days to find out what sort of land it was according to their father's command. But as soon as they had off-loaded the dhow, the brothers left Darod on the shore and sailed away. And the place where Darod was left was called Bereda, where we were now.'

Amiina, like all Somalis, was a born story-teller and romancer, and I listened enthralled as she continued:

'When Darod saw the dhow sailing away without him, he knew the reason of his father's command. He was alone on a strange shore but he did not despair, for the help of God was with him, and the wisdom of Allah was his guide.

'He set out in search of water, and although it was a barren country, with few trees, he soon found fresh water and dug a well for himself. Then he set about making a shelter and with a stick he dug himself a cave which would protect him from the wind and sand and sun. The name of the place, here, at Bereda, is called "Godka Darod".

'Thus Darod lived in his cave for many days and weeks. He drank the sweet water of the well, and ate the flesh of the sheep, but finally it came about that he was reduced to the last sheep. When this was eaten there remained only the bones and for the first time he began to despair. But

God was with him and in the morning when he awoke, the dry bones were covered with meat. The next night he left the bones again in the cave and in the morning they were clad with flesh.

'He lived thus for many weeks.

'Then it came to pass that one day he saw a girl with her flocks. He went to meet her and she told him her name was Donbirro, and she was the daughter of Dir, the son of Irrir, and lived in a near-by village. Darod asked her if she would like him to water the flocks for her and she replied that this was impossible since the nearest well was many days' walk away. Then Darod took her sheep and goats and watered them at his own well. Donbirro came every day to the place where Darod lived. Every day she gave him milk from the sheep and goats of her flock and every day Darod watered the flocks at his well. Donbirro was a beautiful girl, tall and of good bearing, with soft and lovely features. Darod fell in love with her and wanted her for his wife.

'But one day Donbirro's father grew curious and asked the girl why the flocks would not take water when they returned to the village. Donbirro did not reply.

'The next day, therefore, Dir, the father of Donbirro, set out with a young man from the tribe to follow the girl when she went out with the flocks. When they found Donbirro she was talking with Darod, near the well, and the flocks having been watered, were resting near by. When Darod saw the two men he feared for his life, and climbed a huge tree that stood close by the well, having first covered the mouth of the well with a large flat stone. That tree is known as "Lanta Ful" (the branch he climbed) and is standing even now.

'The father of Donbirro approached with the other man of the tribe, and when they saw the girl and Darod, they were very angry. Then they saw the well, and the flocks resting, and they coveted the well for the use of their tribe, and wished to take it away from Darod.

'The two men strove to take away the stone from the well, but Darod was beloved of God and they could not move it. Then they called for Darod to come down from the tree, but Darod, knowing they meant him evil, refused.

'Finally, Dir, the father of Donbirro, asked Darod what price he would take to come down from the tree and remove the heavy stone from the well, so that the tribe might use the water. Darod replied that he would come down and remove the stone and give the well to the tribe for their own use, if Dir, the father of Donbirro, would let him marry the girl.

'Then the father of Donbirro told Darod he might have the girl, and

so Darod consented to descend from the tree. But Darod told the two men that if he jumped he would break his bones. Therefore he asked the men to come and stand beneath the tree so that he might step down on their shoulders. The one man, proud and haughty, refused, but Dir, who was the head of the tribe, came and stood beneath the tree, and Darod stepped on his shoulders and came down to the ground, and that was a sign of peace between them.

'And Darod approached the well, where lay the flat stone which the two men could not move, and he kicked it away lightly with one foot. And the tribesmen were amazed.

'Then Darod married Donbirro, and from her he had five sons, and Darod lived out his life in our land and from him are descended my father, Mohamed Boghor, and many other great men. And the tribes of Darod are the Warsangeli, the Dolbahanta, the Isman Mohamed of the Mijjertein, the Ogaden, and the Bartire.

'And Darod was beloved of God, and had great wisdom, and lived the life of a Muslim. He went among the people and spoke to them the words of the Prophet (upon whose name be praise) and turned away from our idols, and towards Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate.'

Amiina, her story told, lay back and I kissed her. Later that evening, under a full moon, she danced for me the butterfly dance of the Mijjertein Somalis. But this night of enchantment was marred by the first whisperings of doubt in my mind, for she then brought up the vexed question of the date gardens at Ghesseli, passionately declaring that the Isman Mohamed were the rightful owners and not the despised Midgans. She angrily resisted my advances when I would not agree. We returned to Alula, both angry, and the doubt and suspicion grew until like the kherif outside, they screamed through my tortured mind that my love meant nothing to her, that she really loved Sheik Abdurraham Mursal's son and that she was just a tool of her father, the Sultan, and was merely pretending a love of make-believe in order to further the ends of her tribe.

Night after night she persisted in her impassioned pleas, first coaxing and then furiously demanding that the date gardens be returned to the Isman Mohamed, and night after night I wearily resisted her blandishments. There was no more love-making between us for she no longer spoke the intimate little endearments I wished to hear, and withheld from me her bewitching body for which I craved.

One hot tropical night the end came suddenly with a violence which appalled me. Mouthing obscenities she screamed abuse in Somali at me. Her eyes went mad. She called me a 'waraba', a hermaphroditical dog. In

her violence she picked up a heavy steel ash-tray, hurling it at me and cutting my forehead.

The warm blood flowed and mingled with the bitterness on my lips. I struck her—hard on the face with my open hand. She reeled across the room, her eyes extended with shock. Tears then flowed and she ran sobbing from the room, away into the empty night.

What is love, I thought bitterly? That elusive something one tries to pluck out of the heavens with clutching hands and eager heart. Is it happiness? Ah! No! A little happiness, yes, during those all too brief ecstatic moments soon to be dispelled by long, weary, agonising hours of unhappiness, and then the hell of hate, for where does love begin and hate finish?

Then comes the sword of jealousy—long and silvered.

It bites through the breast. Not in one long, clean, quick thrust, but slowly questing as though doubting that awful finality. Reaching the heart it probes gently and its tip is withdrawn with just a touch of crimson. A thousand times it touches the target of love and then with one heart-rending, final thrust it goes home and the blade is withdrawn fully crimsoned to the hilt.

The heart is no more. There is no more love. Nothing to love with.

The months passed slowly now and I was in an agony to hear news of the war. I sent a letter to headquarters in Mogadishu requesting a relief so that I might be relieved and sent to a more active sphere. There was no answer.

My gramophone records had long since worn out and I had not had a drink for months. I brewed a kind of 'grappa' from dates and added army ration plum jam, which turned it into a poisonous liqueur, but in the evenings its potency aided sleep.

I could feel the utter loneliness closing in on me. I grew irritable when I found sand in the sugar although I had been used to it for almost a year now. I cursed Yusuf when I found him helping himself to a spoonful of my army plum jam. My last tin. A month later the long-awaited mail came up by diesel with the good news that I was to be relieved at last. The colonel himself was to visit Alula, bringing my relief up with him.

The days and weeks went by monotonously. The nights were lonely without Amiina. I missed her laughter, her tantrums and her tears, but above all I missed her bewitching body with a longing that must remain unassuaged.

A plume of dust over the sand dunes heralded the arrival of the colonel's convoy with my successor, Keith. I saluted and shook hands with them both.

'Well, Collins, you've had a long spell here,' said the colonel conversationally. 'Are you fit?' He looked sharply at me.

I nodded dumbly and ushered them to the house. Haji Dif fussed around, shaking hands with his escort.

The guard commander turned out the guard and presented arms. He inspected them. Minutely. Each man stiffened to attention and gazed rigidly to his front. Gendarme Ali Jama had the top button of his tunic undone. The colonel flicked at the offending button-hole with his cane.

'Do it up,' he said.

Ali Jama quivered with fright, endeavoured to right the frightful enormity with fumbling fingers, then dropped his rifle.

'Pick it up,' rasped the colonel. I blushed.

'Dismiss the guard,' he ordered. I marched to their front, right-turned and stood to attention.

'Guard dis——miss,' I shouted.

The guard commander and three men turned sharply to their right. Ali Jama turned to the left. Chaos.

'As you were,' I roared. 'Guard dis——miss.' They marched off.

We had lunch. The colonel and Keith made small talk, I remained silent. After weeks of waiting for this moment I now resented their presence. I wanted to be alone again.

Kit inspection followed. There were eight spoons missing.

'Haji Dif,' called the colonel, 'ask these askaris where their spoons are.' The askaris remained silent.

'My fault, sir,' I mumbled. 'I borrowed them for tunny bait.' The colonel cocked a quizzical eyebrow at me.

I focused my eyes mesmerically on the red band encircling his cap. Keith sniggered.

'You did what?' snapped the colonel. I found my tongue at last and explained in great detail how a spinning spoon would attract tunny better than live bait. He was no Isaak Walton fan and was not amused.

'The hospital,' he said. We inspected it.

'The lines,' he said. We inspected them.

'The latrines,' he said. We inspected them. They smelt.

'The armoury,' he said. We inspected it. In a corner stood half a dozen spare carbines with bayonets attached. A spider had built an intricately laced web festooning the bayonet points. 'Pretty, sir,' I remarked lamely as he poked the web to pieces with his cane.

'The jail,' he said. I sweated.

The head warder herded his prisoners into the courtyard. Their warrants were in order.

'Any complaints?' barked the colonel.

Their spokesman, the prisoner on remand for homicide, hobbled forward and spoke for about ten minutes. He bared his shin and pointed dramatically to a grubby bandage.

'Well?' the colonel asked Haji Dif.

'He bloody fool, colonel sahib,' lied Haji loyally. 'No griff. Far gone.' He tapped his head significantly.

He was rewarded with a black look and a grunt.

'Nur.' The colonel called his orderly.

Nur was a sergeant. One of the detribalised, flat-nosed riverines from Mogadishu. He quickly ground the cigarette he was surreptitiously smoking under his heel and came forward. He saluted oilily, darting Haji Dif a spiteful look.

'They complain about torture called "kriket", colonel sahib. They say this Tenente far worse than Italian officers. All say they tortured every Saturday. They request you remove him and replace him with an officer full of the milk of human kindness.' Keith burst out laughing. The colonel smiled and said that he would investigate their complaints. So ended the first day's inspection.

'Cigarette, Collins?' The colonel produced a packet of Players.

'No, thank you, sir, I don't smoke,' I gloomily replied. The three of us were in my sitting-room. I moodily watched a praying mantis fly to its inevitable death against the bright lure of the pressure lamp.

The colonel produced a bottle of Scotch.

'Have a whisky?' He spoke encouragingly.

'Er, no thank you, sir, not at the moment,' I replied. He helped himself and passed the bottle to Keith. I stared at the wall. At the grotesque, leaping shadows cast by the lamplight. Absent-mindedly picking up the colonel's glass I drank deeply, gasping with pleasure as the unaccustomed drink hit my stomach. His wise eyes looked sharply at me as he poured himself another drink in the glass Keith produced for him.

'Tell us about cricket, Collins,' he coaxed. He poured me out another drink. I scoffed it as though it were lemonade. My enthusiasm returned. I gave him the griff.

'It will take time, sir,' I concluded, 'but I really believe that through the medium of cricket I can break down the caste barriers between the tribes and so end this constant tribal fitina.'

Quite involuntarily I continued, 'Give me another year here and I can

accomplish it.' I now wanted to stay on at Alula. The whisky was at work and I felt sad at leaving. The colonel spoke dryly.

'No, Collins, you leave with me the day after tomorrow and as soon as you reach Mogadishu you will proceed on a month's local leave to Kenya. You're in need of leave, you've earned it and the change will do you good.'

He gave me his old-fashioned scrutiny. What he really meant to say was, 'You're as mad as a hatter and the sooner I get you away from the sun, sand and the Somalis the better for all concerned.' He continued, 'I've a friend in Kenya called Pell. He farms in the highlands at a place called Molo. I'll give you a chit to take with you—he'll make you very welcome.'

The hand-over completed we left two days later. Old Haji Dif, almost in tears, gave me two beautiful Somali daggers in their decorative skin sheaths. I presented him with a wrist-watch which I had sent over by dhow from Aden several months ago. We shook hands in the Moslem fashion, that is after the normal handclasp we pressed thumbs, which is one of the superstitions of the country relating to 'Hhudur', the Prophet.

Hhudur is a man, yet not a man. A Prophet, yet not as great as Jesus or Mohammed.

According to the legend he is gifted with eternal life to which God has attached certain conditions. He must never stay long in the same place but must wander as the wind wanders, disappearing and appearing at will. Sometimes he will ride on the dust-devils so common here. He must never marry or settle down. The Somalis believe that Hhudur often visits in the guise of a beggar. He prays for those who are kind to him and they amass great wealth. Those who are unkind to him are ruined. No one can tell who Hhudur may be or where he is. There is only one way of recognising him. In his right thumb there is no bone, only flesh, and if one shakes hands with him his thumb will bend backwards. If anyone finds Hhudur in this way he is supposed to grasp his hand until Hhudur's blessing is given, saying, 'I will not let thee go except thou bless me.'

'Nabad gelyo, sahib,' he said, salaaming, as we hit the road for Mogadishu and Kenya.

8

A WEEK later I found myself on the Somalia mail with a severe hangover, heading for Kenya. Past all the familiar landmarks *en route* until we reached Nanyuki, with the glacial fingers of Mount Kenya towering above us in the cold morning sky. I shivered. What a contrast this lovely mountainous Kenya was compared to the arid wastes of Somalia. Through Thika again with the coffee trees lush green and sagging under the weight of the red berries, ripe for the picking. On to Nairobi where I made for the *Sunday Post* Officer's Club, dumped my kit and met many old friends in the bar. Followed a round of riotous parties at Torr's Hotel, the New Stanley, the Norfolk, the various army messes and Muthaiga Club.

I met Josephine, a pretty corporal in the F.A.N.Y.s, and we went to a dance at Brackenhurst Hotel, some twenty miles outside Nairobi. I had never danced before, but with a load of wompo aboard I summoned my flagging courage and asked her. Leaving the friendly bar and stepping on the dance floor was rather like leaving the sandy beach of Alula and boarding a dhow. 'It's a fox-trot,' she said.

I nodded, clutching her, we did a sort of Somali shuffle, quite primitive and essentially simple. After about five long minutes she asked me if that was the only step I knew. Couldn't I side-step or reverse? I told her I was a Shag-bag and that Shag-bags didn't dance. She resignedly led me back to the bar where we did much better.

'You know,' she said, 'you should take dancing lessons. Dancing is a social asset, you can't drink all the time.'

I thought this a splendid idea and the next morning rang up a dancing school in Nairobi for my first lessons in tripping the light fantastic. Over a couple of Pimms' in the club I mentioned this to Douglas, a Political Officer on leave from Kismayu. He was most enthusiastic.

'I'll come with you, old boy,' he remarked cheerfully. 'Keep us off the wompo, and anyway my wife is always complaining about my standard of dancing.' He bought another round of Pimms' and then made our way to the dancing academy above the Empire Cinema and bar. We had ten minutes to go before the lesson and bought a couple more Pimms' to put us in the mood as it were.

The dancing instructress looked formidable. A big woman with a generous bosom. She wore a gym-slip affair and pranced about like a Bessie Bunter. Putting on a record she collared Douglas and put him through his paces.

'A bit rusty,' she laughed heartily, her bosom heaving. I was quite fascinated. 'Whacko,' she said, 'your turn now.'

I fared even worse than Douglas for she didn't approve of the Somali shuffle. We all three looked unhappily at each other. She then went to a cracked mirror, thrust an ample arm behind it and produced half a bottle of gin, three glasses and a flask of water. So ended our dancing lessons.

Douglas was quite philosophical afterwards. 'Ah well,' he said. 'We can't all be gigolos.'

Later on during the day he asked me if I would like a great dane puppy, which he bred at his home in Uganda. The idea appealed to me. He sent off a telegram to his wife asking her to rail up to Nairobi one male puppy from a recent litter. I suddenly remembered the colonel's letter to his friend Pell, farming at Molo in the Kenya highlands, and as I'd only ten days of my leave left resolved to visit him. Hiring a dilapidated Chevrolet car I drove out of Nairobi and along the twisting escarpment overlooking the Great Rift Valley, passing through Naivasha and Kakuru *en route*, and without much difficulty found Pell's farm in the emerald green hills of Molo. Pell and his wife were kindness itself. I stayed with them a week enjoying their hospitality. Pell had a perverse sense of humour for he asked if I rode. I did? Would I like to ride Punch? I would. When I saw Punch in his stable I wasn't too sure. He looked enormous compared to the little Somali ponies I had been used to and didn't seem at all friendly. As we approached the stable door back went his ears, his wicked eyes rolled showing his teeth.

'Feeling his oats,' said Pell. 'He's a bit of a puller but you should manage him all right.'

With the help of Pell's syce I clambered aboard and we were away. No mention had been made of the fact that Punch had not been out of the stable for a month but I quickly found out that I could not control him. We pounded on.

The more I sawed at his mouth with the reins the more determined he became. We jumped a hedge and a ditch, then a dried-up river bed loomed ahead and Punch soared over that. I didn't, for we parted company. Punch pounded on, seemingly heading to tackle the Great Rift Valley. I returned on foot to the farm, much to the amusement of the Pells.

After a week at Molo I returned to Nairobi and at the Officer's Club Douglas presented me with the puppy. We took to each other immediately and I named him 'Hamlet' on the spot. A couple of days later found us heading north on the Somalia Mail and upon reaching Mogadishu I learnt that I was to be posted to Bardale.

Bardale was a small post on the fringe of the wild Ogaden country beyond Dolo. It had little to commend it. It was a tiny Somali village based on the permanent wells there, but it abounded in game and as I motored along with my relief platoon saw large herds of oryx, hartebeeste, Grevy zebra and the usual smaller plains game. At Bardale my house and platoon headquarters consisted of a little tin hut built by my predecessor. It was constructed of flattened-out paraffin tins. I soldiered on here for six months, making the usual routine safaris from water-hole to water-hole. Hamlet did not enjoy himself. Now quite sizeable he was a problem on our camel-treks. As the sun rose high in the sky his pads grew hot and he would make for the nearest thorn tree, panting with misery, his great red tongue lolling out with the heat, and there, under the shade, he refused to budge. I constructed him a 'howday' on top of one of the camels and from his lofty perch he did all subsequent safaris in style. Bardale was not an exciting station for the Shifta seldom raided as far south as this and when they did come down on a sporadic raid the tribes themselves coped adequately. There was little tribal friction on the old principal that 'an enemy's enemy is a friend'.

From Bardale I was posted west to Iacle.

For my camp site at Iacle I had chosen a large tamarisk tree. Scattered around the water-hole were the usual stunted acacias and the wild henna of the Somali country which supplies a sweet-smelling flower. The water-hole itself, some one hundred miles from El Wak on Kenya's northern frontier, was a large catchment of water in a deep sandy pan. The water was stagnating and foul with a thick crust of evil-smelling dung laying deep upon the surface. It was the only remaining water-hole within a radius of one hundred miles and supplied the precious life-giving fluid every day for ourselves and the tribesmen who flocked to it in their hundreds with their thousands upon thousands of sheep and goats and vast camel herds. We had endeavoured to fence off a small part of the pool and so far had succeeded in keeping out the watering stock from fouling our little supply. Then came a bull elephant. Sleeping lightly under a full moon I was awakened by the sentry. He whispered urgently, 'Marodi'. Cautioning him to be silent I listened. From the direction of the pool came strange gurglings and standing up I could make out the

enormous ghostly shape of the elephant as he voluptuously rolled in the precious water.

He must have got a whiff of my wind as I cautiously approached him for up went the mighty trunk, he swung out of the water, and then the great earth-shaking animal passed silently from my sight, uncannily melting away into the darkness.

The following morning the damage to our fenced-in stretch of water was apparent. His giant feet had stamped the thorn fence into the muddied water and as he had walked out he left his spoor which looked like shell-holes in the mud.

As one man the Somali platoon clamoured that I kill him as he would be back and foul the pool completely if I did not do so. With some trepidation I signalled to Sergeant Abdalla to follow me and picking up the Manlicher we followed the spoor. We proceeded cautiously for about half an hour with the slight wind in our favour when Abdalla spotted a reddish-grey mass to our front.

In the cold light of morning the elephant looked enormous. He was puffing clouds of red dust over himself and his great ears waved gently to and fro. I could make out the ridiculously small eye. His tusks gleamed in the early sun. A friendly ant-hill afforded me comforting cover some seventy yards from him. Slowly bringing up the rifle I gently squeezed off at what I thought was the brain shot. Alas, for youthful inexperience. My shot was too high. The depression above the eye in that bone-combed, granite-like head had led me astray, for as the bullet struck he swerved swiftly in our direction. I fired again, making another mess of it. The elephant screamed horribly. Back went those enormous ears and with his trunk tucked in his chest he charged.

A charging elephant is a great leveller and in those split seconds of fear I saw myself knocked down, perforated by his tusks, then stamped into the ground. He was on top of us when Abdalla gave me a shove. He tore past, a living mountain of fury. Thorn trees and scrub bushes were knocked down in our path as I scrambled to my feet and shakily picked up the rifle. Abdalla looked at me. I tried to control my trembling. Looking longingly back in the direction of camp we reluctantly spoored him up again. I sweated.

We came up to him after a long hour's spooring.

Abdalla tested the wind and we manœuvred so that we were broadside on to him again. Slowly, so slowly, we approached. Fifty, forty, thirty yards, using what cover we could until a convenient fork of a thorn tree presented itself. Using this as a rest I aimed again for the brain in that

enormous boulder of a head. The sights grew blurred as I concentrated on a killing shot. I saw his wickedly glinting, red bleary eye, and above it the depression with the smallest trickle of blood from my first abortive shot. Suddenly, back went his ear, disclosing the orifice of the ear-hole. Steadying myself I fired. He crumpled and crashed to the ground. Running up from behind I gave him a second shot in the back of the head as he trembled in his death throes.

Whilst living here with the nomads, mostly of the Merille tribe, I learnt that the Somali has a passion for news, following their proverb that 'news liveth'. No traveller ever passes an encampment without planting his spear in the ground and demanding intelligence; thus it is that news flies through the country.

On a routine safari to El Wak we arrived at a large Somali encampment and spent the night with them.

'What is the news?' enquired the headman of Sergeant Abdalla as we marched into the zariba. The sergeant squatted on his heels and accepted a 'tebed' of camel's milk, relaxing under an acacia as the rest of the platoon off-loaded the camels. The old men, the warriors of the clan and the youths gathered around us.

'It is good news if Allah pleases,' was the sergeant's reply.

'Wa sidda' (Even so), responded all the listeners.

'The sahib shot an elephant the other week,' continued Sergeant Abdalla.

'Even so.'

'Gendarme Ali Ibrahim was bitten by an 'abesi' (venomous cobra) yesterday and we had to send him back by camel to Iacle.'

'Even so.'

'Gendarmes Nur and Farah have got scurvy and are to be returned to Mogadishu when the next ration convoy comes through.'

'Even so,' they groaned.

And so it continued. No Somali is reckoned a good story-teller unless he can rivet the attention of his audience for an hour or more without mentioning anything in particular.

The sergeant then questioned the headman but as nothing of interest appeared to be forthcoming I sauntered over and watched the womenfolk at work. Some were tanning hides for water-skins. They use a bark with a pleasant aromatic odour. It is called 'mohur'. Powdered and sprinkled dry over a wound it also acts as a styptic. Others were making cord from the 'hig' or wild sisal. They were beating the fibres of the leaves with

stones, rotting them in water, then masticating them until a reasonable string was produced.

That night, lying on a camel mat, half asleep in the Somali twilight under a waning moon, I listened to Gendarme Ali Hersi, who was considered something of a dandy and a lover of women, courting a comely Somali girl whilst on sentry-go. Feeling sympathetic, and knowing there was little danger from any marauding Shifta, I did not upbraid him for his seeming neglect of duty. Negligently leaning with his rifle against the trunk of a 'lebi' tree whose canopied branches of interlaced thorns cast a delicately shadowed pattern on the moon-silvered sand, his theme of course, was an amatory one, as he poured out his longing to her. He invited her to come with us to El Wak, comparing her legs to the tall straight 'lebi' tree upon which he was leaning. From what I could see in the fading light she had generous breasts which he compared to the twin cupolas on Mogadishu's largest mosque. He went on and on, describing all her charms in a droning chant. A soft wind sprang up, causing the whistling thorns about the camp to call eerily in the night as I fell asleep dreaming longingly of Amiina.

Early the next morning we moved on with the whole tribe accompanying us part of the way. Sergeant Abdalla explained to me that whilst sleeping the camp was visited by a plover, the 'galu', which constantly flew over us crying 'Gal', 'gal'. To the superstitious Somalis this meant a move, for the 'galu' had spoken.

El Wak (the Wells of God) proved to be the biggest watering centre in this part of the country. Upon our arrival countless herds of camels were being watered at the hundreds of wells, some over two hundred feet deep. The wells themselves had been dug out of the limestone rocks centuries ago .As many as twenty tribesmen, naked, except for a tobe wound round their loins, were drawing water from several of the wells. They formed a human chain as far as the eye could see into the gloomy depths below, their bodies glistening with water and sweat as the leather buckets revolved from hand to hand with great dexterity and rapidity. Hard work this, for no sooner had one herd of camels been watered than another herd would take its place at the troughs. The watering song of the camels chanted by the two men filling the troughs and repeated by the human chain below echoed weirdly as if from another world.

A week later, whilst resting up at Iacle, the monthly diesel brought up the rations and mail. I learnt that I had been promoted captain, was to vacate Iacle with my platoon and return to Mogadishu *en route* to El Carre as second-in-command of 'D' Company.

9

In Mogadishu I learnt that Simon, the second-in-command of 'D' Company, had been killed, and from Tubby, the company commander, lying wounded in Mogadishu Hospital, heard the whole story. Tubby was bitter about the reverse they had suffered at Denane Dere where one platoon of Gendarmerie had intercepted a force of Shifta estimated at two hundred. He lay propped up in bed, his shoulder shattered by a burst of sub-machine-gun fire. 'I split my force,' he muttered. 'I had to in order to stop them making off with the camels. Young Simon bought it together with his orderly and three gendarmes who tried to get him out of it. They were all killed together.'

I commiserated with him.

'What the hell do they expect?' he burst out. 'They are armed for the most part with .303's, they've plenty of automatic weapons and what have we got? Bloody useless Italian carbines with ammunition twenty years old or more.' He shifted uncomfortably in bed and groaned, but brightened up when I told him that I was taking Simon's place with a new consignment of Bren guns and Mills' grenades.

It was with mounting excitement that I neared El Carre with my escort, through the frowning El Mara pass, constantly climbing now through the foothills dotted with the colourful crimson flamboyants, cape chestnut and cedar trees. El Carre village came in sight and behind the village the station itself, the battlemented fort, stores and houses built of stone, quarried locally, the whole boma built on a steep hillside nestling under overhanging red sandstone cliffs. This was Indo Adde's stronghold in the hills, built by his enthusiasm and energy in less than two years, out of nothing. His well-remembered figure now approached me as the diesel came to a grinding halt on the parade ground.

'It's good to have you with us, Dougie,' he said as I saluted. 'Come up to the house and meet the rest of the chaps, we've laid a party on for you.' Followed by Hamlet I met Claude again, who had taken over the company from the wounded Tubby, Keith, and Bruce, who was just in from Imi where he had a platoon on detachment—Bruce, the Spartan, the

baby of the Gendarmerie, for he was only eighteen years old when he joined us, but already an almost legendary figure in the Ogaden. Bruce of the tireless energy, and never-flagging enthusiasm—he was possibly the only officer we had who could walk the Somali troops off their feet. He had one drink then left to supervise the off-loading and unpacking of the Brens, .303 rifles and grenades.

An hour later the overhanging cliffs above us reverberated and echoed with bursts of gunfire as he tested out the Brens. Shattering explosions followed as he enthusiastically lobbed grenades at imaginary Shifta.

'H'm,' smiled Indo Adde. 'I don't think we shall have young Bruce with us much longer.' A little later he came in caressing a Bren gun.

'What is the allocation for my platoon?' he asked Claude.

'One Bren per section,' was the reply.

'Grenades?'

'A dozen boxes.'

Bruce smiled. A happy smile.

'Good enough,' he said, 'I'm off.'

'But what about the .303's,' expostulated Claude. 'You've got to hand in your .256's first and I want complete issue lists for Mogadishu otherwise I shall be for the high jump.'

'All being done now by my sergeant, old company commander and sir,' replied Bruce airily.

Simon had been a particular chum of Bruce's and I pitied any Shifta prisoners who unluckily fell into his hands, for Simon had not been a pretty sight when his body had been recovered. With a wave Bruce was off, back to his isolated little post at Imi, where Mohamed Abdullah, the Mad Mullah was buried on a bluff overlooking the Uebe Scebelli and where Bruce was using the same fortifications for his platoon which the Mullah had constructed fifty years ago.

At a nod and a few words from Claude, Keith hurriedly followed Bruce to see, as Claude put it, 'He didn't take all the bloody Brens and grenades with him to Imi'.

Indo Adde, Claude and myself then had a conference on the present situation in the El Carre district. As well as 'D' Company at El Carre with the detachment at Imi, Indo Adde, as District Commissioner, had under his command the Mounted Infantry Company on the Uebe Gestro at Ela Medo. This company was commanded by Bill, a tough, wiry Kenyan of Irish extraction who, in later years, was to become one of the more famous white hunters in East Africa. His second-in-command was Ian, a

Scot, who had recently been awarded the Military Cross in action against the Shifta.

During the following months we had two successful, bitter little skirmishes with the enemy, but with our new weapons and increased fire power it was becoming increasingly difficult to bring them into action. Then came Denane Dere. Late one morning exhausted Rer Afgab tribesmen came into the boma with the familiar story of a Shifta force, estimated at one hundred and fifty men, who had split up into three groups and shot up some dozen manyattas in the Rer Afgab grazing lands and had murdered the tribesmen who had pitifully endeavoured to pit their spears against their rifles. Each group had seized some three hundred camels, had reformed at their rendezvous, and were on their way back to the border with the rich haul of 1,000 camels, worth £3,000. Indo Adde held a hurried conference. Time was precious. I had just returned from a hard fourteen days' patrol and so was detailed to hold the fort at El Carre. Indo Adde himself would give chase with two sections of mounted Illalos, four of the chiefs to whom the looted stock belonged and about thirty Rer Afgab spearmen. He would dash across country and a Gendarmerie platoon with Claude would follow the motor road as far as Jororo in their two three-tonners and proceed on foot to Ticcu, just over the border, and make contact with him there, for according to the information we had the raiders were making for this direction. As soon as he had definite news of the Shifta's whereabouts, he would despatch a mounted scout to meet the Gendarmerie. The chase was on. Taking a short cut to the north of El Carre, Indo Adde reckoned that this would allow him to cut the Shifta off near Ticcu, or failing this, bring his force close behind them.

An eight hours' hard, gruelling ride through the midday heat followed. Cruel outcrops of sharp lava rock tested the sure-footedness of the pack mules and ponies; soft stretches of burning sand thickly bushed by stunted thorn trees with their millions of tiny wait-a-bit thorns plucked viciously at the pursuers' clothes as they threaded their way through.

The country now opened up and the track dipped deep and followed a long, winding river bed. Cooler now, the sun had long since fallen, and as dusk approached the little party, thoroughly exhausted, decided to make camp. There was water in the 'lac' which would satisfy the needs of men and animals. Scouts were sent ahead for information and sentries were posted. Two Syces collected armfuls of coarse, long grass which grew on the river bed, then fed and hobbled the animals. Indo Adde rolled himself into his blanket and huddled close to the log fire for warmth as the nights were chill. The rest of the party lay in a circle round the camp, each man

with his rifle or spear close by him. The stars came out and the tired party slept. At about 4 a.m. an excited scout woke up Indo Adde with the unbelievably good news that the entire party of Shifta were encamped in the same river bed about ten miles further on.

Luck was with the pursuers for the scout had ascertained that the Shifta, feeling secure, had failed to post sentries.

Indo Adde gulped a dish of scalding tea, scribbled a message for the Gendarmerie and characteristically decided upon a dawn attack; with the Shifta in such a vulnerable position he could not afford to wait for reinforcements. They mounted, and led by the scout, went ahead. For two hours they proceeded, the ponies' hooves breaking the silence as they dog-trotted along. They followed the scout up the river bank and here they dismounted.

The ponies and mules were left hobbled in a thicket with two spearmen to look after them. The remainder of the party went silently ahead. In single-file they went at right-angles to the river bed when quite suddenly they came to its edge again and Indo Adde, led by the scout, peered over.

Dawn was just breaking. There lay the sleeping Shifta in several groups, each party huddled up to a herd of camels. The dying embers of their camp fire cast leaping shadows and silhouetted the sleeping figures of men and animals to the watchers above. All was silent except for the plaintive bellow of a tired camel, followed by the hollow wooden thunk of its bell as it found a more comfortable position.

Indo Adde disturbed this tranquil scene by lobbing a grenade into the nearest group of sleeping Shifta. The wildest scenes of confusion followed, with the Illalos playing havoc with their rifles on the now scrambling figures below. They had lived for this moment.

The levy spearmen rushed down into the 'lac' with exultant cries to secure their stampeding camels from the bewildered and demoralised Shifta. Minutes passed. The cries of the wounded, the challenging shouts of the Illalos and, rising to a frenzied crescendo, the snarling roars of the now thoroughly terrified camels, heralded the morning.

The counter-attack came as the Shifta recovered from that first rude awakening, and when they realised what a comparatively small party they had to deal with. Indo Adde had hastily retired to a small knoll overlooking the lac with less than half his little party as the Somali in a fight is nearly always uncontrollable. The spearmen had already rushed off, each man trying to cut out from the main herd as many camels as he could possibly handle whilst half the Illalos were engaged in hand-to-hand fighting elsewhere in the dense thorn-scrub.

The attack came with startling suddenness. A large bunch of seemingly disorganised Shifta extended in a long line and to the call of a bugle rushed up the knoll, chanting their war cries and firing as they came.

Well directed rifle-fire and grenades from the defenders sent them back temporarily but they immediately re-formed and came again. A second time they were repulsed and during this breathing space, Indo Adde realised what a really desperate position he was in. His handful of men knew too and were wavering. His interpreter, Mohamed Jama, not a fighting man, was nursing a bullet-splintered leg with fear in his eyes.

Bashir Double, Indo Adde's bodyguard, was busy with his knife settling old scores with the wounded. A hurried check of his ammunition showed Indo Adde that he had just twelve rounds left, with his Illalos in a still worse plight. Escape was impossible, for the Shifta were in between himself and the thicket where he had left the ponies.

The Shifta, sensing the helplessness of the little party on the knoll, grew bolder, closing in for the kill. This, thought Indo Adde, frantically working the bolt of his rifle, is the end.

With dramatic suddenness, however, when all seemed lost, a well-directed burst of Bren-gun fire on the left flank shattered the extended line of Shifta, who wavered, then broke. The Gendarmerie platoon, in a wonderful forced march from their lorries at Jororo, covering twenty miles in four hours, had heard the firing and desperately raced to the rescue. In the fight which followed, Sergeant Gurrach Ibrahim won a very well-deserved Military Medal. Seventeen enemy dead were counted on the field, but the total losses inflicted on the enemy were far heavier, as some of the dead and most of the wounded were carried off by the retreating Shifta.

'Well,' said Indo Adde, rounding off his story later in the mess, with a shaky laugh. 'This calls for a little wompo. Old Suban really enjoyed himself,' he continued. Ugas Suban Wako, over sixty years old, the Chief of the Gherire, and a personal friend of Indo Adde's, had cast all dignity aside after the first opening burst of Bren fire. Gathering his tobe up over his withered thighs he had sprinted down the knoll to a dead Shifta. He calmly took off his own well-worn Somali sandals, unlaced the dead Shifta's ex-Italian officer's riding boots, jerked them off the corpse and put them on himself. Honour was satisfied, the looters had been looted.

The months passed quickly for there was never a dull moment at El Carre. When we were not out patrolling the frontier we would go hunting in the hills behind El Carre, which abounded with lion, leopard

and greater kudu. We
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'I thought the idea
interest.

'Here is a letter for
recommendation.'

He promised to loo
days later I presented

and greater kudu. We were now contacting the sporadic Shifta raids when I received a letter from headquarters stating that I was due to go to England on L.I.L.O.P., as it was called in Army jargon, meaning Leave in lieu of Python. Evidently I had missed my Python leave a year ago. I didn't particularly want to go, but over a couple of gins Indo Adde persuaded me that the opportunity should not be wasted. Quite casually he then asked me if I'd thought of transferring from the Gendarmerie into the Administration on the political side. The idea intrigued me.

'I thought the idea might appeal to you,' he smiled as he saw my interest.

'Here is a letter for you addressed to the Chief Administrator with my recommendation.'

He promised to look after Hamlet for me until my return and a few days later I presented myself to the brigadier.

10

I THOUGHT I cut quite a figure with long, blond hair curling over my shoulders, for such was the fashion in the Ogaden. On my slouch hat I wore my lion tail with the black tuft making a dashing hackle. A blue Indian-army-style shirt and shorts with Fox's puttees, green flashes and Somali sandals completed my attire.

I saluted and gave him Indo Adde's letter.

He looked at me for a long time.

'I can't quite make out, Collins, whether you are supposed to represent a Christmas tree or whether you are masquerading as Buffalo Bill,' he said cuttingly. 'Clear off and report back to me this afternoon properly dressed. Get yourself a haircut for a start.'

He was quite affable in the afternoon.

'Well, why do you want to join the Administration?' he asked.

Indo Adde had briefed me.

'I would welcome the added responsibility, sir, further, I feel that my future career lies in that direction. The work appears to be much more interesting than that of a soldier-cum-policeman.' Then I continued quite honestly, 'I am interested in the Somalis. I feel sympathetic to their aspirations, feel that I understand them, their problems, their way of life, and as an Administrative Officer I am sure that I can get closer to them.'

'Very well,' was the answer. 'Major Sidney has given you a good recommendation and I can give you an assurance that upon your return from leave you will be transferred to the Administration. I will speak to your colonel on the matter, asking him to release you.'

'Have a good leave.'

Catching the *Matiana* two weeks later in Mombasa I sailed for England. The twenty-one-day voyage made a pleasant change on the warm waters with the phosphorescence below, but as we entered the colder waters nearing England the white cliffs of Dover aroused little enthusiasm in my breast, for already I was nostalgic for the desert, with its indescribable lure, being alone but not in solitude.

My family gave me a warm welcome but I felt like an alien. It was

December and as cold as charity outside with a high wind blowing the swirling snow against the window-pane. I hardly ever saw the sun and when the moon shone on these cold nights it wasn't for lovers but for the astronomer.

Mother had arranged a tea-party in my honour to which most of my relatives had been invited, a few other friends and the vicar's wife. Clack, clack, clack went the knitting needles and click, click, click went their tongues as I entered the room clad only in my brightly-coloured lungi and Somali sandals. The knitting needles stopped, so did the tongues as they stared at me as though I were some apparition from outer space. I found myself gazing into the fire, at the leaping flames and white-hot embers. Half-asleep, I was back in the never-never land of Somalia. My sandal dropped off. Drowsily I reached out and picked up a pair of scissors from an occasional table and started to cut my toe-nails. There was a frozen silence as I went click, click, click with the scissors. It then penetrated. Cutting one's toe-nails at a tea-party was not the done thing. I apologised.

'Terribly sorry,' I mumbled, 'but I thought I was back in the Shag.' My poor mother, the wonderful person she is, took it very well.

I stayed in England over Christmas, then cutting my leave short by two months returned to Africa. On arriving in Mogadishu I found myself posted back to the Mijjertein as a District Commissioner in charge of Iskushuban, where I remained for a year.

Iskushuban in Somali means 'Meeting of the Waters', and here the Italians had built a theatrical fort stuck high on top of a hill overlooking the junction of two lacs. In the courtyard of the fort was a huge statue of Mussolini, minus the head. The Somalis told me that the South Africans, during their Mijjertein campaign, had attached a tow-rope to the neck and had forcibly decapitated 'Il Duce' with the aid of a ten-ton truck.

At this lonely desert outpost I first tangled with the S.Y.L., the Somali Youth League. The Somali Youth League was originated by progressive young Somalis as far back as 1943. Most of the Somalia Gendarmerie were members, as well as the majority of Government servants. It was approved of by the Administration. Their aims briefly were to unite all Somalis, particularly the youth, and to eradicate tribal friction. To this end they wished to unite and form a Greater Somalia, which would consist of British Somaliland, Somalia and the Ogaden. The extremists of the party also wished to include French Somaliland and the Northern Frontier District of Kenya. All very laudable and the only economic solution for the Somalis as a whole. Another of their aims was to adopt the Somali

language and to put to use the script known as 'Osmania'. Again understandable. Abdi Rashid Ali, my District Clerk, one of the up and coming young Somali politicians, was the local S.Y.L. President and from time to time he inadvertently undermined my authority as he impatiently wished to take over the reins of government, so tasting the fruits of the soon to be won freedom which they fondly hoped would be theirs in the future. I was sympathetic to these aims but couldn't condone Abdi's efforts to raise, forcibly or otherwise, funds for the party from the desperately poor tribesmen in the district. We had arguments and friendly discussions and it speaks well of our just Administration that should the Council of Foreign Ministers not give them immediate independence, they then wished Greater Somalia to be administered by the British under United Nations trusteeship for a period of ten years.

Their hopes to this end were raised immeasurably in April of 1946 when on circularised instructions from Mogadishu all District Commissioners and District Officers were instructed to hold barazas and inform their parishioners that no less a person than Ernest Bevin, as wise and far-seeing a Foreign Minister as we've ever had, himself favoured the idea of a Greater Somalia which he had put forward to the Council of Foreign Ministers, using his own words, 'To give the Somalis a chance of a decent life'.

Over the past two years there had been vague rumours and speculations as to the ultimate fate of Somalia: that the country might be returned to Italy; that Russia might take over, or America; or that the Somalis would possibly remain under the British flag. This was a period of uncertainty, for without any long-term policy our jobs as Administrative Officers were rendered extremely difficult. This first declaration of a long-term policy helped considerably, but then several months later I was compelled to hold another baraza for the British Government, under pressure from the United States of America, had turned a double somersault and instead of this worthy and far-seeing proposal being grasped as a life-line it was abandoned because of lack of support in the Council of Foreign Ministers. The United States' Foreign Secretary stated that the Somalis were not able to determine what was best for them, and still more because of Imperial Ethiopia's refusal to surrender the Ogaden.

Sullen discontent followed and veiled threats were made that if they were handed back to the Italians, as Abdi put it, 'like a cooked gerenuk to a hyena', then blood would stain the desert. My relations with him became strained, gone was the happy friendship that hitherto had existed between us. I cursed myself for the unenviable position I was in and my

inability to help them. I cursed headquarters for prematurely raising their hopes of a Greater Somalia, but above all I cursed those clueless clots in the Council of Foreign Ministers.

The pity of it then—the pity of it more so in the future for the Somalis' dignity and independence will not allow him to be used as a pawn in power politics and these rumblings of discontent erupted two years later during the bloody, tragic riots in Mogadishu.

Shortly after this I was transferred from Iskushuban down south to Bardera. A cuckoo was the cause of this somewhat premature posting. It happened this way.

One afternoon I was swimming in the pool underneath Iskushuban Fort when I quite plainly saw and heard a cuckoo.

As I wrote in an additional paragraph for my monthly report—'I recognised its distinctive flight and heard quite clearly its dulcet, unmistakable notes.' My Provincial Commissioner, a keen amateur ornithologist, told me when I reached Gardo I was far gone and that cuckoos did not exist in the Somalilands. I hotly disputed this, but years later happened to pick up a handbook on African birds. I looked up cuckoos: '. . . Found everywhere in East and Central Africa with the exception of the Somalilands . . .'

A telegram awaited me in Mogadishu from Indo Adde saying that Hamlet had been taken by a crocodile at Malka Taka. Poor, adventurous Hamlet. In these hot, desert regions he could not resist entering water, little knowing in his puppyhood the dangers which lurked beneath the seemingly innocent stretches of the Uebe Scebelli River.

On the wing to take over as District Commissioner, Bardera, I passed through Isha Baidoa, the centre of the native millet production and met my new Provincial Commissioner there who made me *au fait* with matters affecting my new post. I took over the station from Bricky and inherited his two pet cheetahs, Shag-bags and Bright-eyes. Caged in a big wire enclosure they made beautiful pets and comforted me a little for the loss of Hamlet. They had insatiable appetites, a couple of goats a week being their staple diet. Slowly I trained them. It required infinite patience. Two old jodhpur straps made ideal collars for them and on my Jubaland safaris the tribesmen saw the spectacle of two cheetahs riding in style on camels.

I found my political duties interesting and the work much more onerous than when I was a soldier. In Court cases I learned to avoid quibbles by the Legal Department and the subsequent turning down of cases. Somali witnesses I found were usually put right off their stroke by normal methods of examination and by question and answer. Infinite patience is essential.

The best method was to let them tell their story from beginning to end for when a Somali gave his evidence he would frequently mix up what he thought happened with what he saw and heard. It didn't do to take statements without probing a bit. For example, when asked if anyone else was present a Somali will invariably answer 'No' if the others were women or children only, whereas such 'babes and sucklings' are some of the most reliable witnesses you can get. I would be chary of awarding compensation for the complainant had always recourse to the Civil (Khadi's) Court to recover his damages.

Jubaland was a sportsman's paradise. Elephant, buffalo, lion and leopard abounded in the thick cover on both banks of the river. I received frequent requests from the riverines to deal with marauding elephant who raided their millet shambas, eating and stamping flat the lush stalks as a change from their normal diet of acacia branches and wild sisal. Whole shambas were devastated by the herds but the elephant is a sagacious animal and after I had shot several of them they kept to their own confines in the thick, impenetrable bush bordering the river. The 'gu' (rains) then came along, which meant heavy storms for weeks to come. Safari in this weather was a nightmare, for the rains would turn the desert in this region into an impassable mass of black-cotton mud. No ordinary mud this but a thing all of its own. The lorry's wheels would churn hopelessly in the glutinous mess and then dig in, sinking up to the axles. When walking, every step I took picked up pounds of the mud, necessitating stopping every several steps to scrape it off, with the process repeated *ad infinitum*. The camel caravans could not move and the ungainly legs of the baggage animals would shoot out like ill-made trestles as they slithered and sprawled in it.

As if by magic the rain would awaken a world of insects. Flying ants would shed their transparent wings over the camp and beetles which gave off a crushed-almond-like odour flew unerringly into the soup. Scorpions and centipedes would appear, then stick beetles, difficult to see until they moved, so much do they resemble a piece of stick, the branches of which are their fragile, twig-like legs. Dung beetles would laboriously roll their spittle-mud-bound egg balls to a destination they alone knew.

After serving nine months at Bardera I found myself posted to Lugh Ferrandi, still in the Juba Province, with the Bishop as my neighbour stationed at Isha Baidoa. He was a character. Tall, in his late thirties, he was quite bald-headed and had an infinite capacity for gin. A convivial soul, I welcomed his visits to Bardera, necessitated by the frequent tribal fights between his parishioners and my own. It was like a game of soccer

between them. The Somali, with his infinite duplicity and machinations, is an adept at playing off one District Commissioner against another, and would often cause open rifts between two officers if they were at all parochial in settling the fitina between their tribes.

This seldom happened between the Bishop and myself for he was patience personified, and if I sometimes became a little heated in the office listening to the bitter denunciations and tirades of the chiefs, our difference would be ironed out in the long evenings over a bottle of gin, when he would stretch out his six-foot frame in a camp chair, look reflectively at the Juba flowing beneath us and drawl, 'The hour of gin, the most civilised hour of all'. One such evening there were three of us sitting under a tree, for his arrival had coincided with that of the Principal Medical Officer from Mogadishu, who was on a tour of inspection of the hospitals in the Juba Province. He was a colonel, very conscious of his rank, pompous and somewhat fussy.

He was not impressed with the Lugh Hospital and was scathing in his remarks that the eleven Somali patients had to sleep on mats placed on the hospital beds.

'A most deplorable state of affairs,' he said, helping himself to my gin. 'Why have you not indented for bedding—you knew it was available? I have wired Mogadishu for sheets and blankets for the patients and they will be issued to them tomorrow.'

'Do you mean to say, sir,' asked the Bishop incredulously, 'that you intend to issue sheets and blankets to the Somali patients?'

'Yes, why not?' snapped the P.M.O. 'What do you think about the idea, Collins?' he said, turning to me. 'It's your District and you're responsible for the running of the hospital.'

'It will be an interesting experiment,' I replied cryptically.

The following day the P.M.O.'s instructions were duly carried out and the snowy white sheets and blankets were tucked round the unbelieving Somali patients, the lazy, the lame and the few genuine cases. They fingered the sheets with reverence. The next morning a very irate P.M.O. found only one patient left in the hospital, minus his bedding. He was too sick to move. The other ten had disappeared into the bush with their bedding, taking his for good measure.

A few months later I received a telegram from headquarters saying that I had been promoted to Major, was to hand over to the Bishop and proceed to Mogadishu *en route* for El Carre which I would be taking over from Indo Adde.

I reached Mogadishu the day before the rioting. It was late afternoon

and the Cathedral bells were tinnily chiming as I drew up outside the 'Croce del Sud'. The atmosphere was tense with armed police well in evidence at every street corner, for the Four Power Commission had just arrived to report on their findings and to make a recommendation for the future administration of the country.

The Italians were determined to impress the Commission with their following. They had hung out Italian flags and held processions without permission from the British Military Administration. The brigadier had already informed the Commission that processions would lead to rioting and worse, but this grave warning was ignored by them and the brigadier was instructed to let them take place as and when the various political parties wished to hold them.

On the 11th January, 1948, permission was given to the Somali Youth League to hold their first procession. The Italians decided to hold one the same day.

Early in the morning a convoy of Italian-driven lorries left Mogadishu for the outlying villages to bring in the pro-Italian supporters, mostly of the Abgal tribe, in order to break up the Somali Youth League procession.

They did so, driving their lorries into the ranks of the marching Somali Youth League adherents, and it was with difficulty that the police controlled the crowds. Violent anti-Italian feeling was aroused and that night, a night of horror, fifty-one Italians were killed, being speared and knifed by the fanatical Somalis who so bitterly and implacably opposed the return of their country to them. The blame for this massacre lay with the Italians themselves, who could not foresee the hate and violence their high-handed action in breaking up the S.Y.L. procession would cause, and also with the Four Power Commission who so wilfully, in their ignorance and foolishness, ignored the warning given to them by the Chief Administrator.

Having lived with the Somalis intimately over the years, having fought with them, wept with them, laughed with them and loved with them, I still do not fully understand them or their mentality. How foolish then are these Commissions, whether they be sent from one nation, or, even worse, from a number of nations. How senseless and futile the visits to Africa of brash individuals, whether they come from the United States of America or anywhere else, who spend a month or so in a country and then return with their recommendations on this and that.

The Chief Administrator these days was a sorely harassed man, but he found time to give me a short interview prior to my departure for El Carre.

'The stage in the theatre of diplomacy is now set,' he said. 'In September of last year formal notification was received by the British Government that Ethiopia wished to resume control and administration of their former Province of the Ogaden. In short, we have recognised Ethiopia's right to take over the Ogaden and we have entered into a Treaty of Commerce and Friendship with them.

'We shall withdraw some time during the end of this year, the aim being to complete the hand-over within one month. The task will not be a simple one. Consideration has to be given to the political consciousness of the Somalis. As you are aware, the Somali Youth League are particularly strong up there and they will bitterly oppose the hand-over. In order to prevent an outbreak of violence I am reinforcing the Ogaden with a battalion of King's African Rifles and an armoured car squadron. You will have one company of the King's African Rifles to support the present two Gendarmerie companies at El Carre. During the actual hand-over Royal Air Force Tempests will make demonstrations and be prepared to help the ground forces if necessary. Provision has been made for troop-carrying aircraft to evacuate casualties by air. You will be informed later of the precise date of the hand-over.

'There is one thing I wish to make quite clear to you, Collins. My personal feelings and yours will not enter into this operation. We are soldiers and we carry out orders. Whatever you think personally of the Ogaden being returned to the Ethiopians must not influence you one iota nor prejudice a smooth hand-over. The job will not be an easy one nor pleasant. I'd hoped that Major Sidney would have remained to complete the hand-over, but he has urgent personal affairs to attend to in Nairobi and has been released from the Army. He asked for you to take over from him and I've agreed. We have our own problems here in Mogadishu so do not trouble me overmuch by signals. Colonel Frobisher, the Provincial Commissioner in the Ogaden, whom you know quite well, will put you further in the picture when you get up there. Good-bye and good luck.'

11

THE Ogaden smiled on my arrival, for the few light showers presaging the spring rains had caused the acacias and crimson flamboyants to bloom and the whole of the El Carre valley was carpeted with wild petunias. The station had altered little during the years. It was a depressed Indo Adde who welcomed me back together with Colin, now company commander of 'D' Company, and his two subalterns, and Geoffrey who commanded the King's African Rifles. 'E' Company, Somalia Gendarmerie was on detachment at Imi.

Indo Adde told me that he was returning to his farm in Kenya. The return of the Ogaden as a whole with its districts of Callafo, Dagahbur, Gabredarre and El Carre was a personal tragedy for us all, who, over the years had served there and knew in our hearts that it was morally wrong; but the loss of El Carre was the bitterest pill of all for him to swallow for he had created this station out of a wilderness, protected the Somali tribes against the Shifta depredations from over the Ethiopian border, only now to see them handed over piecemeal to the very people who had ravished them in the past. El Carre, with its rich pasturage in the low country and vast camel herds, had been singled out by the rapacious Shifta and had suffered more grievously than had the other districts.

We were in the office completing the hand-over.

'We have kept our promise to the tribes over one thing only,' he said. 'The Ogaden pay-out. Colonel Frobisher at Gabredarre has the matter in hand now and you should be receiving the money in a couple of months' time. The total sum to be paid over in respect of the whole of the Ogaden Province amounts to £91,000. Of this sum we are to receive £43,000.' He continued, a little more happily, satisfaction creeping into his voice, 'The British Government has been making a grant in aid to Ethiopia and this money comes out of that.

'The tribes are to be compensated for every man, women and child murdered or wounded and for every camel, cow, sheep and goat looted.

'Look at them,' he said, as the chiefs and elders filed in the office to pay

their last respects to him. There they stood, apprehensive and solemn, their future so arbitrarily decided for them by the remote politicians of far-off Whitehall.

'Do they look happy to you?' he ground out savagely.

'Look, read that.' He threw a London paper across the desk to me and stabbed a forefinger on one of the leaders.

I read, 'Great rejoicing by Somalis of Ogaden at being handed back to their Mother Country.'

I looked up in the faces of the chiefs and then old Ugas Suban Wako spoke. Slowly and sadly with sorrowful bitterness, he voiced the fears of them all, in the sonorous cadences of his voice.

'Indo Adde and Abdi Melik, we greet and salute you. You have fathered us in good times and in bad times. You, Indo Adde, are leaving us now. In a few months' time Abdi Melik leaves us too. When you have gone who will protect us? The Habash? They are worse than the accursed Shifta who are spawned out of their country. Can we protect ourselves? With what? Can our spears travel as fast as their bullets? Our fighting men will be killed, our women will be ravished and our children will starve for our herds will disappear as do the blades of grass in the "haggai". Take the money you are going to give us and buy us rifles and ammunition to defend ourselves and our country. Of what use is money to us here in the desert? We have spoken.'

With infinite weariness Indo Adde replied apathetically.

'This thing I cannot do, for we have our orders. It is good-bye, old friend.' We made our way out of the office, shaking hands as they clustered round us. Nothing more could be done, nothing remained to be said. Nothing.

Dispiritedly I saw him off. The chiefs melted away and I was left alone in the square. From the twin flagpoles on the office fluttered the Union Jack and the Ethiopian flag of black, red and gold. Thoughtfully I walked to my house.

On the following day I received a long letter by mounted courier from the Provincial Commissioner at Gabredarre, Colonel Frobisher. He had hoped to have arrived at El Carre, bringing money for the El Carre pay-out to the tribes later on in the month, but trouble had flared up in the Wardere area where the Sinclair Oil Company had been drilling for oil for several months past. They had recently flown in from Addis Ababa a transport aircraft with more of their American personnel aboard. Unfortunately the plane had the Lion of Judah plastered on it which so incensed the local Somalis that they stoned the plane and its occupants. It

left hurriedly whence it came. Late that night an attack was made on the oil camp itself which was repulsed by the Gendarmerie.

The colonel would arrive at El Carre when the trouble at Wardere was contained.

Then came the news from the Rer Wafata in my own district.

A raiding party of over one hundred Shifta had swooped down on them and their grazing stock only twenty miles east of El Carre itself. The insolence of this provocative attack left me shaking with anger as I shouted for my orderly to call my company commanders.

I gave them my orders.

'I want the whole Somalia Gendarmerie company to move off in an hour. Haversack rations only, fifty rounds per man, Bren guns, grenades. The K.A.R. company to remain here on garrison duties.' Snatching up a map I studied it closely.

'By this time I reckon they will be heading for the Bohol Bar lac, somewhere here in this uninhabited country, they're unlikely to go farther south for there they would run into the Rer Afgab who are thick on the ground there. We've a mounted infantry patrol to the north and their spies will almost certainly be aware of this. It's now eleven o'clock, off you go, Colin. I will follow after you with an escort of Illalos on ponies.' Glancing at my watch I estimated that we should, with luck, be able to make contact with the enemy and cut them off in the late afternoon.

The bugle shrilled its alarm as I called for Kibrit, the syce, to saddle up Harma Barre. Giving orders to the waiting Illalo sergeant-major I instructed him to have an escort of six mounted Illalos ready. Strapping on my revolver and binoculars I ran to the parade ground where my escort awaited me. Snaking their way out of the boma was a line of khaki as the Gendarmerie moved fast to the east.

Swinging into the saddle I could scarce hold Harma Barre, fresh out of the stable. A beautiful bay, half-Arab, half-Somali, we tore after the Gendarmerie where I brought him to a snorting, curvetting halt. Telling Colin to make all speed we covered the miles effortlessly and at length were clear of the foothills. Ahead of us, stretching as far as the eye could see lay the Adamboi plains, the grazing land of the Rer Wafata. Calling halt I dismounted, handed Harma Barre over to the orderly, and swept the plains with my binoculars.

Far in advance of the Gendarmerie we waited about an hour, then in the shimmering heat haze with the storm clouds packed high above I picked up a large cloud of dust which I first thought was a dust-devil.

Studying it closely I then saw that it was a large camel herd being driven rapidly over the plain in our direction.

Keeping well hidden I scribbled a chit out for Colin telling him that I'd made contact and to hurry up his company. A mounted Illalo galloped off with it.

The looted camel herd now came nearer at a shambling trot. Through the glasses I could distinguish the Shifta raiders urging them on ever faster. My five Illalos tensed with excitement, fingering their rifles expectantly. Crawling back to our tethered ponies hidden in a gully we led them as we slowly retreated before the unsuspecting enemy, taking what cover the sparse dur trees afforded. I prayed for the arrival of the Gendarmerie in our precipitate though necessary withdrawal.

The camel herd was now less than a mile away. Levelling the glasses again I could make out the Shifta scouts well ahead of the camels with the rest of the raiders on the flanks. They were well armed. Clutching at my sleeve my orderly pointed away to our left where the point scouts of the Gendarmerie emerged through the scrub behind us closely followed by Colin leading the first section. Glancing at my watch, the hands pointed to ten minutes past four. The company had covered almost twenty miles in less than four hours.

They were quickly deployed in a long line facing the enemy, each man hugging cover—a tussock of grass, a stunted bush or a mound of wind-swept sand. I squatted near a Bren gunner. Nearer they approached and still nearer. Their scouts were right on top of us. One yelled an urgent warning and brought up his rifle as I screamed the fire order. The scouts crumpled as the Brens opened up point-blank on them, then traversed the startled enemy with short, accurate bursts. Pandemonium. An enemy bugle shrilled. The big camel herd stampeded in all directions and several collapsed, bellowing with pain as they ran into the cruel cross-fire.

The Shifta sullenly retreated. We advanced and Abdullah, my orderly, spun round and collapsed as a bullet caught him.

They were in full retreat now as we chased them, for this was not their type of fighting. To be ambushed by an equally well-armed party was far different to them attacking a lonely Somali camel karia with a pitiful number of spearmen pitted against them.

We re-formed. Two sections were detailed to round up the terrified camels whilst the third section formed a protective perimeter around us. Casualties. Seven enemy dead, three wounded prisoners. One gendarme slightly wounded and Abdullah killed by that unlucky winged messenger of death.

Threatening clouds now gathered on the horizon over the El Carre hills. The first rain fell, presaging the long-deferred rains. It grew dusk as the last of the camels were driven in.

A sudden rattle of rifle-fire startled me. The three wounded prisoners had been shot, as had the wounded camels. Such summary execution required no orders from me, for in these bitter desert skirmishes no quarter was asked or given. They were lucky for they died quickly. Our own prisoners taken by the Shifta died a much slower death.

The corpse of Abdullah was gently placed over his pony and tied down. The dead Shifta were left where they fell for the hyenas and scavengers. Mounting the nervous Harma Barre I turned him and headed back with my escort for El Carre. As the heavy raindrops lashed us Colin and the Gendarmerie herding the camel herd followed on.

We arrived back at El Carre sodden with the torrential rain, tired and dispirited at the loss of Abdullah. The malaria that had been creeping up on me suddenly struck as the fever took hold. Reeling out of the saddle, my teeth chattered uncontrollably as I wearily handed over Harma Barre to the waiting Kibrit, mechanically instructing him to rub the exhausted pony down and to give him a good feed of millet.

It was now midnight. Stumbling up the track to my house I took off my wet clothes, dosed myself with quinine and fell into bed. I tried to sleep but the virulent fever brought on delirium as I tossed and turned on the bed. Through the small rain-lashed window I saw the sullen sky as a thin streak of lightning, followed by a clap of thunder, showed the storm raging with unabated fury.

A sullen roar followed as the El Carre waterfall rushed in a furious spate over the cliffs and down the age-old gullies, its red torrent spreading on to the grazing lands below.

Raging in a delirium I tossed aside the blankets as I fought again at Bohol Bar. I heard the Shifta bugle shrill and heard again the coughing war cries of the enemy and the challenging taunts of my own men.

Drenched with perspiration I called out and felt soft, cool hands caressing my face, wiping away the perspiration. I caught an almost forgotten, elusive scent of myrrh. In my dream I heard her voice, 'Sleep, Abdi Melik, sleep. Amiina has come back to thee.'

Two days later the fever left me. Amiina was no dream but a wonderful reality as I lay awake listening to her soft, musical voice.

She had remembered the little English I had taught her and haltingly told me of the death of her husband, who had been killed in a tribal fight almost a year ago. She had run away from the family as his brother wished

to marry her according to the tribal law, and had spent several months hiding with her mother's people in the hills near Iskushuban. Finally, she had boarded a dhow at Tohen, sailed to Mogadishu and had made her way to El Carre by traders' trucks and camel caravans.

I lay back and looked at her. She had changed little over the years. Gone was the slim litheness of her body, but the long years had dealt kindly with her, rounding her figure to a fuller, voluptuous shapeliness that left me longing with desire.

She read my eyes and smiled slowly, provocatively, the smile I remembered so well during those days of enchantment at Alula.

'Tonight!' I whispered. 'Tonight, Abdi Melik,' she replied, leaning over me then lightly brushing a forefinger over my eyelids.

'Now sleep, beloved, sleep.'

She swayed out of the room and when I awoke from a dream of peace it was dark.

The storm had abated. A soft-falling rain pattered outside on the thatched roof of the house.

The moon bathed the room with its pale light. Through the open window I watched a single moon-flower slowly unfold its delicate beauty as its fragrance, freshened by the rain, mingled with the quicker-scented myrrh as she noiselessly entered.

She tried no coquetry as she impulsively disrobed, impatiently sweeping away the black-lined head-dress she now affected. The long, black hair rippled and cascaded down to her thighs. Her breasts, maturer than I had remembered them, stood out like twin cupolas of desire.

There were few preliminaries and no waiting in a madness such as this. Bereft of all senses we strained to each other as she gave herself to me.

The lonely years were forgotten as we found each other again.

A week later I took her on a routine patrol and this was to prove to be my last safari in the Ogaden. The route took us over rocky, precipitous country, with the foothills of Ethiopia before us. The haze cleared and away and beyond the foothills rose tier upon tier of majestic mountains, blue in the distance—Ethiopia lay before us.

The ponies followed the path worn deep in sandstone rock face and Kibrit, my Ethiopian syce, assured me that this was the very same caravan path the Queen of Sheba, named Balkis, who was then Queen of the Abyssinians, had taken over a thousand years ago when she visited King Solomon in Jerusalem.

When we camped for the evening, Amiina, ever curious, asked Kibrit

why the Queen of Sheba visited Solomon and this was the story he told us, handed down from ancient Ethiopian mythology:

'The existence of the Queen was first made known to Solomon by the lapwing, who reported to him that she and her people were sun-worshippers. Solomon sent a letter to Balkis by the lapwing and the bird dropped it in her bosom. The letter was scented with musk and sealed with the King's famous seal. In it he pledged her peace and to surrender herself and her people to him and embrace Islam.

'The Queen decided to send gifts to him and despatched five hundred men slaves, five hundred women slaves, five hundred bricks of gold, a gold crown set with pearls and large quantities of musk and amber.

'The Queen had heard stories from merchants sailing over the Gulf of Aden of Solomon and was dazzled by the reports of his handsome person and the wealth and splendour in which he lived. The more she heard the more she marvelled and in spite of the length and the difficulty of the journey she decided to go to Jerusalem to see this wonderful man, and above all that she might learn wisdom from him.

'Her caravan consisted of seven hundred and ninety-seven camels and countless mules and asses, and so she set out on her journey with great pomp and majesty and an enormous baggage train.

'She crossed the Gulf of Aden in a fleet of fifty dhows.

'Solomon welcomed her cordially, paid her great honours and gave her apartments in his own palace.

'Solomon thought Balkis a woman of splendid beauty and after a few months invited her to come and dwell with him, so that he might complete her instruction before she returned to Ethiopia.

'The Queen accepted his invitation and that night in his fragrant chamber, for the air was redolent with the perfumes of oil of myrrh and cassia, she ate freely of the highly seasoned dishes which were set before her, and drank her fill of spiced wine.

'Solomon intended that both the peppery meats and the spiced wine should both increase her appetite and make her thirsty and they had this effect.

'When the royal banquet was ended Solomon came to the Queen and said to her, "Take thou thine ease here for love's sake until daybreak". And she replied, "Swear to me by thy God that thou wilt not take me by force. For if I, a maiden, be seduced, I should travel back on my journey in sorrow and tribulation."

'Solomon said, "I swear unto thee that I will not take thee by force, but thou must swear unto me that thou wilt not take by force anything that is in my house".

'Balkis swore and then the servants prepared a bed for Solomon on one side of the chamber and a bed for the Queen on the other.

'Solomon slept.

'And there was water which he had set out near the Queen's bed in his wisdom and as he awoke from his sleep the Queen was pouring out some of that water into her bowl so that she might drink, for the highly seasoned dishes and spiced wine had made her thirsty.

'Solomon seized her hand and said to her, "Was there not an oath between us? I swore not to approach thy vessel, and thou did'st swear not to approach mine." And she said to him, "Let me alone, after I have drunk thou can'st fulfil thy desire".

'And he permitted her to drink water, and after she had drank water he worked his will with her and they slept together.

'From this union they begot Ebna Hakim and his royal name was Menelik.'

We had been out a week when a mounted Ilalo rode into camp with a message saying that Colonel Frobisher, the Provincial Commissioner, was on his way from Gabredarre to El Carre and would I return urgently for the Ogaden pay-out to the El Carre tribes. I hurried back, and the colonel arrived two days later, with a strong escort. An old friend, he had been in charge of the Ogaden since 1941 and was called the 'Lion of the Ogaden' by the Somalis, they themselves are referred to by the other tribes as lubah (lion) because of their warlike spirit.

He had, I gathered, already completed paying out the tribes in Gabredarre, Callafo and Wardere and we immediately began the prodigious task at El Carre, followed by the out-stations at Imi, Malka Taka and Ela Medo.

The specie, in sealed boxes, consisted of £43,000, all in twenty-shilling notes, and as the claimants queued up—a child who had lost its parents as far back as 1941, or a grey-bearded ancient who was the sole survivor of a massacred clan—each would receive his blood-money, the dia, affix a thumb-print to the acquittance roll which was signed by the colonel, witnessed first by myself and then by the chief of the clan concerned. Individuals were dealt with first and then the tribes who had so grievously suffered in the past by the looting of their camel herds. This money was paid out in bulk to the chiefs themselves in the presence of their headmen and clansmen, with the Khadi as an additional witness.

We completed the pay-out in eight days and were both sitting in the living-room of my house reflectively sipping a whisky and soda. The colonel was to return to Gabredarre on the following morning.

He broke a long silence by saying in a satisfied voice, 'Well, Douglas, we've now honoured our promise to the tribes for they have been paid in full.'

'Blood money,' I replied a little bitterly.

'Does it really compensate them for all they have suffered? Could we have done less for them?'

There was no reply. I replenished his whisky and soda.

He sighed. Tiredly he said, 'Now there only remains "Operation Hectic". This is my swan-song, for as soon as the Ogaden is handed over I return to my home in Tanganyika.

'The first Ethiopian troops are scheduled to arrive at El Carre on the 30th August. I've brought you up detailed instructions which are in your office. Peruse them carefully. You will see that everything on the Station is to be left behind, including the Gendarmerie companies and the Illalos, who are to be paid up in full by you plus a six-months' gratuity. It will be up to each individual gendarme and Illalo whether he re-engages for service or not with the Ethiopians. They take over everything, lock, stock and barrel. You will have inventories to prepare and make sure you get the Ethiopian District Commissioner's signature on everything you hand over. His name, by the way, is Ato Alemayehu Bezeneh.

'As far as the cash on balance is concerned, bring that to Mogadishu together with your cash book for the chief accountant. Make sure it all balances, for if there are any discrepancies you will be held responsible. Let me see now. Today's the 25th July, so you've just over a month to prepare everything. A battalion of Ethiopian troops will be taking over from you, and when you finally withdraw you will be escorted by the King's African Rifle company.

'It's an unpleasant job, I know, but cheer up, I've good news for you. The Ethiopians, as you know, are difficult people to handle, being suspicious of all Europeans. They're great drinkers, however, and so I've allocated for you two cases of whisky which I have brought up with me. If they prove difficult and intractable during the hand-over, ply them with this and get them in a mellow mood. It will require much tact on your part. Ply yourself with it too, you'll probably need it. Be diplomatic, but above all be polite in your dealings with them. Do you envisage any trouble here by the way?'

'No, sir, there will be no trouble,' I replied quietly. 'The Ethiopians, you tell me, will have a battalion of troops, I have two companies of Gendarmerie, the Illalos, and a company of King's African Rifles under command. We're also to be overflown by Tempests too, I gather. Rather

a formidable force for a few hundred Somali spearmen to tackle,' I continued in rather an aggressive tone.

The colonel, wise and steeped in years of Army and Colonial Service tradition, was not to be drawn, for he said kindly, 'Ah well, I'll leave El Carre in your hands then. I shall be off first thing tomorrow. I shall be seeing you some time in Mogadishu next month. Good luck with the hand-over. Good night, Douglas.'

'Good night, sir.' He walked out of the room and into the guest cottage near by. Pouring myself out another whisky I moodily watched the cedar logs burn as the last flames flickered into dying embers. Amiina noiselessly entered, kissed me and seated herself at my feet.

'You were listening,' I reproved her. 'Well, you've now got the griff—and what does my lovely Somali amourette think of things?'

'I no understand "amourlette", Abdi Melik,' she replied. Amiina couldn't pronounce her r's, which she lisped and turned into l's.

'Yes, I have the gliff,' she continued passionately, her breasts heaving. Her eyes narrowed as her excitement mounted.

'Now it's the dirty Habash'—she fairly spat out the words—'who are taking over the Ogaden, our people, our country, for who live in the Ogaden but Somalis? In one, mebbe t'lee years the Italiano then take over the rest of Somalia. Somalia, Somalia.' She rocked to and fro on the floor in a paroxysm of grief.

'Oh, Abdi Melik, where will this, this evil thing end? Where is, is——' 'Future,' I gently helped her. 'There is no future,' I said bitterly. 'We must live for the day.'

We found comfort in each other's arms, like two lost children. The dying embers flickered and the kindly darkness enveloped us as she slept in my arms, moaning a little in her sleep. My own dreams were not pleasant ones.

The weeks quickly passed and at length the inevitable day dawned. For three days now Tempests had overflown El Carre, zooming up and down the valley, banking in their perfect formation and then returning to Mogadishu. I had completed all the inventories for signature and had paid off the Gendarmerie and Illalos plus their gratuities; they were left with the choice of serving the Ethiopians or returning to their villages. I felt sick at the injustice of it all.

The Ethiopian battalion did not arrive on the appointed day and early the next morning I sent two mounted Illalos down the valley to see if there was any sign of their advance troops. I had made elaborate arrangements to dine at least fourteen officers, including Geoff, Colin, his two subalterns

and myself. Two whole sheep had been killed and curried and a quarter of a sack of rice purchased from the village. For a sweet there was fruit salad, consisting of bananas, paw-paws and passion fruit from the garden, to be served with a dozen tins of cream.

As rations for their troops, estimated at three hundred men, I had purchased six meat camels and twenty-four sheep on the hoof.

At just after 10 a.m. the two Illalos reported back saying that the entire battalion had arrived in last night and were now encamped three miles down the valley. They were, apparently, making no move to enter the boma.

Thinking this strange I had Kibrit saddle up Harma Barre. As an afterthought I placed two bottles of whisky in the saddle-bags. Accompanied by the two Illalos I then rode down to find out what the hold-up was.

They were camped under a clump of acacias in the valley. A sentry with rifle and fixed bayonet barred my path as I approached. I could not speak with him, neither could my Illalos. Telling the Illalos to dismount and remain where they were I whispered to the pony, who, needing little encouragement, shot past the discomfited sentry and up to a tent with the Ethiopian flag flying on a pole outside. Dismounting, I saw a dozen Ethiopian officers gazing at me from inside the tent. Outside and in the perimeter of the camp their troops were sprawled all over the place. Some were playing cards, some cleaning rifles and equipment, others sleeping.

Tethering Harma Barre to an acacia I walked up to them and saluted. Introducing myself I asked enquiringly for their administrator, Ato Alemayehu Bezuneh. A small man, wearing a pith helmet, dressed in khaki tunic and shorts, stockings and boots stood up and bowed. I bowed back, we saluted and shook hands.

'Welcome to El Carre,' I said in my best diplomatic manner.

'We are glad to meet you, Major Collins,' Ato Alemayehu replied in careful, precise English.

'Would you please introduce me to your brigadier and his officers,' I ventured politely.

The introductions were made. Coldly and stiffly. Ato Alemayehu brought me up a chair. I sat down with a polite word of thanks. There was silence.

The brigadier was a tallish man with a badly pock-marked face. He wore a .45 holstered revolver. Drumming the fingers of his right hand impatiently on the camp table in front of him he waved a black horse-hair fly whisk with his left hand.

He spoke sharply in Amharic to Ato Alemayehu, who translated apologetically. I began to feel sorry for him.

'The brigadier wishes to know, considering the friendship which exists between Ethiopia and Great Britain, why you chose to send two mounted spies into his camp this morning. He is very angry.'

Be diplomatic at all times, but above all be polite, were the last instructions of Colonel Frobisher.

I counted ten.

'Inform the brigadier,' I said, still politely, 'that the two mounted Illalos I sent down from El Carre were not spies. I sent them to ascertain whether you had arrived on time or not. This I wished to know for I have arranged a dinner in the brigadier's honour for himself and his officers. I am sorry that he should misunderstand my action and I do apologise if I have unwittingly offended him.'

An impatient wave of the fly whisk.

'Would you ask the brigadier if he will now enter El Carre, and if he, and his officers, will do me the honour of dining with me and my company officers tonight?'

Another impatient wave of the fly whisk followed by a few curt words.

'The brigadier will consider your request,' interpreted the embarrassed administrator.

'God, give me patience,' I prayed.

An impatient whinney from Harma Barre then happily reminded me of the two bottles of whisky in the saddle-bags. If ever there was a time and place for a little quick drinking it was now.

Walking over to the pony I soothed him and produced the two bottles which I placed on the table. Opening one of the bottles I poured a good three fingers into two of the enamel mugs on the table. Standing to attention with raised glass I gave the toast, 'His Royal Highness, Haile Sellassie, King of Kings and Lion of Judah.'

Gasping slightly as the whisky hit my stomach I looked pointedly at the brigadier. He shot up to attention followed by his officers, who all responded to my toast. More mugs were produced. The brigadier then toasted His Majesty, The King. One bottle rapidly disappeared, quickly followed by the second.

The brigadier slapped me on the back, beamed and spoke quickly in Amharic. Happily, Ato Alemayehu translated, 'The brigadier will enter El Carre now and will accept your invitation to dinner on behalf of himself and his officers. He hopes the handing-over will be carried out with due regard to the friendship between Great Britain and Ethiopia.'

Smiles all round. A bugle shrilled. The officers clustered round me admiring Harma Barre as I mounted. Impatiently shaking his head we tore off, followed by my escort. The Ethiopian sentry presented arms as we flew by.

A few hours later the Ethiopian column wound its way up to El Carre, the brigadier mounted on a white mule at the head of his brigade. They were watched apprehensively by the Somali population as they moved into the boma. I rode down to meet them, saluting the brigadier as I led them to their prepared camp site. Presenting the camels and sheep to their troops, I asked the brigadier if he would like to provide a Guard of Honour for our farewell parade this evening. He would be delighted.

In the meantime I handed over the Station to Ato Alemayehu, who signed my inventories without any quibble.

Introducing him to the waiting Somali chiefs I ostentatiously presented my two ponies, Harma Barre and Abdilleh, together with Dik-Dik the mule, to old Ugas Suban Wako, the Gherire Chief. I knew he would look after them but although fortified by another couple of quick whiskies this almost broke my heart. The hand-over was rushed through and at sundown, in the El Carre square a Guard of Honour from the Gendarmerie, the King's African Rifles and the Ethiopians was drawn up in a hollow square in front of the office. To the melancholy call of the bugle the last Tamaan sounded. The Union Jack was slowly lowered as I took the salute, leaving the red, yellow and green flag of Ethiopia triumphantly stirring aloft.

Later, Colin, Geoff, the two subalterns and myself were seated around a long trestle table placed outside my house. Twenty full bottles of whisky were on the table. We had already killed two bottles when our guests arrived. More introductions, more flowery compliments and more courtesies were exchanged. More bottles were opened and the serious drinking began at this mockery of a party.

I remember little of what followed. The curried dinner was obviously appreciated then as the guests one by one staggered off I was left with the brigadier and two of his staff officers. My head hammered but I conquered the vertigo which threatened to topple me headlong as I rose to say good night to my last three guests. The brigadier staggered, he was down but not out. Hoisted up by his two staff officers the trio steered an erratic course homewards.

I looked at the debris on the table and shuddered, but mentally thanked the colonel for his wisdom and forethought in producing the whisky.

Taken in a sufficient quantity whisky is a great leveller, I thought, as I stood up, then fell down.

Picking myself up I wearily groped my way to bed.

A grey morning dawned in a sultry outside world as I woke up, blinking owlishly at the cedar rafters supporting the thatched roof above me. My brain described a circle in the box that was my head as the bats fluttered in vain for something to hang on to. Amiina, already up, gave me a reproachful look as she busied herself with Yusuf in packing my odds and ends.

Time to get up I thought vaguely as she pulled the blankets off my bed and began to wrap up the few pictures I possessed in their folds, the whole bundle being carefully packed into one of the open boxes in the bedroom.

Tottering off to the bathroom I shaved and had a shower, shuddering as the cold water hit me. Dressing mechanically I stepped outside. The lorries, provided by Geoff's company, were already being loaded. Accompanied by my hangover I walked down to the office; only one chore remained. To collect the balance of several thousand shillings from the office safe. The Ethiopian sentry on the office did not realise the fragile state I was in for he presented his bayoneted rifle at my chest as I prepared to enter. Forgetting both diplomacy and manners I spoke to him rudely in English, thrusting aside the bayoneted rifle as he urgently called for his guard commander. Unlocking the safe, I took out the balance of money which I had already packed previously and throwing the key on the office table I joined Colin and Geoff outside with the waiting convoy.

'Ready to move off, sir,' said a pale-faced Geoff, saluting.

'On the wing,' was my reply, clambering into the truck allocated to me. Amiina and Yusuf, together with an escort of three King's African riflemen were perched forlornly on my belongings in the back.

We rumbled our way down through the village, my Swahili driver crashing his gears into first as we lurched forward. Both sides of the road were lined by Somalis who waved their nabad gelyos to us. I was near to tears as old Suban with one of his sons frantically waved from the crowd, rushing forward dragging two protesting fat-tailed sheep behind him as a farewell gift. We stopped, I thanked him and shook hands as we left El Carre with its memories behind.

Camping near Lama Scillindi that night we made good time and reached Mogadishu the following day.

I was granted ten days' local leave prior to my next posting, which was yet to be decided upon. Hiring B.M.A. transport we resolved to spend the leave at Brava, a little coastal resort south of Mogadishu. A Govern-

ment rest-house on the beach had been made available for us and the days passed happily as we sailed, swam or just lazed on the red sandy beach.

All too soon this brief holiday came to an end and returning to Mogadishu I learned that I had been posted to Bendir Kassim in the Mijjertein. Amiina was overjoyed at returning to her own part of the country, so I was content as we motored north again. Past all the familiar outposts, Villaggio, Bulo Burti, Belet Uen, Ferfer, Galkayu, Garoe, Gardo Iskushuban, Karin, and finally Bendir Kassim, a small town built on the shores of the Gulf of Aden. My house here was a sizeable one built of wood on concrete pillars with the usual spacious upstairs veranda which made life bearable during the heat of the day, for during the hot months, the haggai, the temperature would soar above a hundred and ten in the shade.

12

BENDIR KASSIM was the first port of call on the African coast for the ocean-going dhows crossing the Gulf of Aden from Muscat and the Yemen.

During the dhow season it was a picturesque sight to watch them sailing majestically into Bendir Kassim with the trade winds filling their billowing sails. Their cargo consisted of the brightly-hued carpets which the nakhodas and merchants bartered far south in Mombasa.

Amiina and I were often invited aboard the bigger dhows with their carved stern-pieces, decorated with gaily-coloured streamers and the green flag of Arabia flying from the main-mast. As the dhow rode at anchor we would be seated cross-legged on the carpeted poop, sipping cup after cup of clove-scented tea hot from the earth-filled fire-box on deck, poured from an antique vessel and handed to us in cone-shaped cups without handles, listening avidly to the news and stories told us by the ever-courteous Arab nakhodas.

Handsome men they were, with their curved beaks of noses, kohl-fringed eyes and hennaed beards. Brave too, for many a dhow foundered in these treacherous seas; for once caught in the feared kherif only their own stout hearts and Allah the Compassionate could aid them.

Winter, the 'gilal', came and went, but the eagerly awaited rains came late on the parched land and prayers were offered nightly to Allah to send down the life-giving rains. Three inches in this harsh country would be bountiful during the year to make the desert pastures green and to keep alive the strong nutritive thorns for the camel herds.

Then came the 'gu' season, spring, and a pitifully small cloud one day appeared in the relentless sky which, we hoped, heralded the approach of the now desperately needed rain. During the night a few drops spattered and the following morning a heavy storm shower fell. The whole population of Bendir Kassim turned out for this phenomenon for the rains came once a year only. Ancient grey-heads raised their arms high, giving thanks to Allah, the All-Merciful, for his bountiful gift, as the rain soaked into their clothes. Boys and girls ran about naked, screaming with joy as the rain glistened on their coppery bodies. When the storm had ceased they wallowed and splashed in the puddles of it.

Summer, the 'haggai', followed with its hot kherif wind which blasted and parched the land again. Over week-ends Amiina and I would disappear to our isolated little paradise, an oasis called Karin, about twenty miles inland from Bendir Kassim.

Karin was a rock-girt, fresh-water pool, lapped around by the desert and a range of hills alike which kept it pure of contact. Here we would spread our blankets under a dark cluster of date palms, overlooking the pool of crystal-clear water, about forty yards long by fifteen yards wide with a deep sandstone bottom. The pool was bordered on each bank by a carpet of emerald green grass and wild petunias. On three sides the rocks rose sheer above as they scrambled up and formed the coastal range of hills, towering blue-grey in the sky.

By day, naked and unashamed, we would swim in complete isolation. Hovering and darting above us were myriads of dragon-flies, blue, green, scarlet and purple. Leisurely lunching off the cold chicken Yusuf had prepared us Amiina would then pick the golden dates from the overhanging palms for sweet. Wonderfully ineffable week-ends of peace, away from the cares and heat of Bendir Kassim alone with my houri.

If either of us thought of the impending hand-over to the Italians we closed our hearts and sealed our lips, as we lived, loved and dreamed in our little paradise.

I was in a thoughtful mood during one such week-end as we approached Karin, for after a year at Bendir Kassim I had received a secret coded telegram from Mogadishu stating that I was to be relieved and reposted to Alula in order to prepare the Station there for handing over to the Italians. The final blow had fallen and with it our dream-world shattered.

Night had fallen. Amiina was lying by my side, her hair disordered and the blackness of it merging in with the purple shadows cast by the darkly waving palm-fronds.

Near by Yusuf had lit a fire of the aromatic cedar wood, its scented sweetness smoked over to us where we lay on our backs. Above the twilight deepened and the stars twinkled out, one by one until they formed a brilliant galaxy over us. They seemed so near I could touch them.

'Beloved,' Amiina whispered. 'Which star would'st thou like?'

'Any one,' I replied involuntarily. 'But then I already possess the brightest star of all.'

'I no understand,' she said. 'I no understand,' she repeated petulantly, turning on her side and looking at me so that I found myself gazing into the fathomless black velvet depths of her eyes.

'Thou, O star of my delight,' I replied, kissing her.

'For how long, Abdi Melik, for how long?' she queried.

'We will find a future together——' I began desperately, only to be interrupted as she agitatedly spoke in Somali, 'War ya, midina ma yal' (O thou man, there is none).

I gently shook her.

'How didst thou know?' I had only received the secret signal yesterday, had deciphered it myself and had placed the text in my office safe to which I had the only key.

'It was the kherif which brought the cursed news to me for the wind flies quicker over the land than the Ingelesi's simu' (telegraph), she replied.

We were silent with our thoughts.

'When dost thou leave for Alula, Abdi Melik?' she queried, startling me with her uncanny knowledge of my movements, for I had told her nothing, hoping to put off the news until it became common knowledge.

'The Wilson Sahib arrives to take over from me in a week's time. We shall be off to Alula in less than ten days.'

The delicious curve of her mouth then hardened into the determined line I knew so well for she quietly said, 'Tomorrow I go by dhow to Ghesseli to my mother who is sick there, for two, mebbe t'lee weeks, but will wait you at Alula.'

'No, Amiina, no,' I protested in a panic. 'The kherif is not yet over. Listen.'

As if to add emphasis to my warning its eerie whine mourned over our sheltered little grove, causing the palm-fronds to sway and rustle above us.

'No, no, Amiina darling, no. You will go with me by truck to Bargal.' I continued: 'There we will get the fastest camels to Alula and from there you can take a fresh caravan to Ghesseli. Do not go by dhow I beseech thee.'

Ever excitable she rose to her feet and as I too stood up her nervousness seemed to transmit itself into my own body. Holding her in my arms we both trembled. Scornfully she said:

'What dost thou care, Abdi Melik? Before the next Jibal thou wilt be in Ulayu (England) with a white 'nag' (woman) and Amiina will be forgotten as are the desheks in the 'Jilal'. I know thou dost not care, for why should thee? Oh that I had loved a man of my own tribe, and not thou, an unbeliever. Oh that I had never eaten thy salt. Oh that we had never met.'

Clenching her fists and beating me passionately on the chest in her violent grief, she wailed in Somali:

'Iss ka tag, O iss ka tag' (Go away, oh go away).

'Peace, peace, Amiina, I love thee. I wilt come back to thee. This I swear on the Bible, the Inglesi's Koran.'

Then the tears came.

'Forgive, ah forgive me, beloved. Ah, Abdi Melik, I grow mad. I so truly love thee, for thou art my very life.'

She swayed in my arms and we found happiness again, but such a temporary, uncertain happiness, I thought bitterly as we rested. The vexed question of her travelling to Ghesseli by dhow remained unsolved.

The following day, Sunday, we returned to Bendir Kassim in the evening. Monday morning saw me busy in the office, involved in a murder case, when a sudden commotion outside made me adjourn Court. A few of Amiina's close girl-friends were wailing and beating their breasts outside the office door. I quickly gathered from them that the impetuous Amiina had boarded her father's dhow, the *Fatulkhadir*, and had ordered the protesting nakhoda to set sail for Ghesseli.

Running down to the beach I quickly chartered a 'huria'. Giving rapid instructions to the crew of three I told them to paddle out to the *Fatulkhadir* already hoisting sail.

'Faster, faster,' I exhorted the crew, as we approached her. Their glistening, muscular backs arched as they dipped their oars in unison to a quick beat chanted by the first oarsman. Alas, we were too late, for the *Fatulkhadir* was already heeling over as a high wind filled her billowing sail.

I could now recognise Amiina as she stood on the poop waving her head-dress at me.

'Amana Allah' (Farewell), she called. 'Amana Allah, Abdi Melik. Amana Allah, Alula—I see you at Alula, I'll——' The cruel wind carried her voice away as I cupped my hands and called desperately, 'Come back to me at Alula, come back to me swiftly, my life.' 'Amana Allah, Amana Allah,' shrieked the wind mockingly as I disconsolately turned the paddlers back, shorewards, with the *Fatulkhadir* now fast disappearing, breasting bravely through the grey waves, well out at sea.

A little group of sombre-faced villagers awaited me as I stepped ashore, most of them nakhodas and fishermen who had their dhows at anchor in the lagoon, waiting for the end of the kherif before putting out to sea.

'Jama.' I called a nakhoda over. Jama Warsamah, a grizzled, grey-bearded seaman, who knew these seas intimately, stepped forward and salaamed.

'Sahib?' he enquired.

I spoke to him agitatedly in Somali voicing my fears.

'Will she be safe?'

'Only Allah the Compassionate knows,' he replied gravely. 'To him you must pray, sahib. The *Fatulkhadir* is a stout dhow, but the kherif——' We both looked out to sea. At the swelling waves and tossing spume whipped up by the freshening wind.

'When will the kherif end?' I queried desperately.

'One, mebbe two weeks, sahib.'

'Will it worsen?'

'Only Allah knows.'

With that I had to remain content.

That night I couldn't sleep and as I lay awake in my bed alone with my morbid fears my imagination ran riot. My fanciful mind hammered away its message that the kherif outside had worsened, that the sullen surf pounding on the shore presaged a storm at sea.

Wearily I got out of bed, opened up the latticed window and looked out to sea. The sky was dark, hiding the moon and the friendly stars. I was conscious of the velocity of the kherif, which seemed to have veered southwards, a bad sign. I could see big waves breaking out at sea as the moon, for a fleeting instant, revealed itself as it escaped from behind the ominous wedge of clouds.

I paced up and down the upstairs veranda for hours until weary in mind and body I sank into a wicker chair. I must have slept for when I awoke it was dawn at last.

Early that morning I called the Illalo sergeant and had him despatch two Illalo runners on the precipitous path which snaked its way over the coastal range of hills to Ghesseli. Scribbling a message to Amiina, they were to bring me back her reply that she had arrived safely.

They could not be expected back for at least seven days and this proved a long week for me as I toiled, in an agony of mind, to prepare the handing-over notes for Wilson, my successor. My belongings were already packed when he arrived with still no sign of the Illalo runners. I was in a fever of impatience for news of her; yet I dare not leave for Alula by truck and camel, a five days' journey at least, until news of her had arrived. At long last two very weary Illalos walked in one morning as Wilson and I were completing the finalities in the office.

'Sahib, sahib,' called the interpreter, 'the Illalos are back.'

Leaving the astonished Wilson in the middle of checking the cash I ran to the door and went outside.

'The news, the news?' I asked excitedly.

'By Allah, there is none,' replied the Illalo spokesman. He continued.

'The *Fatulkhadir* has not put in at Ghesseli. She may have harboured at Alula, if Allah so wills.'

'Durbo or Merhagno,' I persisted. 'Has she put in there?'

'No, sahib,' was their reply.

'Archie, I'm off,' I called to the mystified Wilson as I ran down to the house, calling for Yusuf to load up the lorry. An hour later I hurriedly said my good-byes to the chiefs, Akils and Wilson. The latter, polishing his monocle in perplexity at my, to him, unseemly haste as I recklessly drove out of Bendir Kassim. Past Karin, with all its memories, and on to Iskushuban where I spent the night with Clive, the present District Commissioner.

Leaving Iskushuban at first light I nearly wrecked the lorry going down the Gargorre escarpment which I took far too fast, but what cared I? She was waiting for me at Alula. Or was she?

The dreadful uncertainty drove me on as I frenziedly flogged the lorry unmercifully, bouncing over rocks and revving up the engine madly when we seemed in danger of digging in the soft sandy stretches.

All the familiar landmarks flashed by until we reached the end of the motor road at Bargal in the evening.

Off-loading the lorry, I sent an Illalo out in search of camels, cursing him without reason when he returned and reported that they would be in at first light, and not that night as I had ordered. I had no reason these days for I was mad. Mad to have even considered the possibility of making the camel trek by night over the perilous Ras Shenegaf headland to Tohen.

We slept. The following morning I sent the lorry back with the driver to Bendir Kassim with a brief note to Wilson thanking him for the loan of it and apologising for my ill-manners and unseemly rush to Alula. He would have the griff by now I thought from his interpreter. I hoped he would understand.

Off we started with the camels tied head to tail as usual. I could not bear the monotonous two miles an hour of the caravan over that desperate track and so with one Illalo to accompany me we set off ahead; half-running, half-walking, until my orderly begged me to rest awhile. But I could not rest, for resting meant thinking, and thinking meant madness. Up and up, toiling on and on in the intense heat. My legs turned rubbery and I tasted the bitter salt taste of sweat on my dry lips. Completely and utterly exhausted we reached the top of Ras Shenegaf at last and away in the distance, nestling on the coast-line, far below us, was Tohen.

13

TOHEN, where dear old Haji Dif, the faithful one was waiting to welcome me as I stumbled and then fell exhausted under a clump of date palms on the outskirts of the village. Somehow he had anticipated my arrival by the uncanny Somali bush telegraph.

'Drink, sahib, drink,' he urged, holding out to me a tebed of camel's milk.

Trembling with thirst and fatigue I drank, spilling the milk as it dribbled down the corners of my mouth. Passing the tebed to the Illalo to finish, I stammered urgently:

'News, Haji, the news.' I looked into his eyes, smoky-grey with the age of him and now infinitely compassionate.

Then I knew.

'She is dead,' I said brokenly. 'She is dead. Dead, dead, dead.' I wept.

Haji Dif knelt by my side and placed his arm around my shoulders as would a father.

'Before God, sahib,' he comforted, 'there is no blame, for what is written is written. The shadows are now long but praise be to God they will melt away.'

'How did it happen, how did it happen, Haji?' I enquired woodenly.

'The *Fatulkhadir* was caught in the kherif. We saw nakhoda trying to put into Alula, but the bloody kherif, sahib, caught him and took him 'long to Guardafui. No hope then, sahib. Dhow dashed 'gainst rocks, they saw from lighthouse.'

'All dead, all drowned—N'Shallah.'

I held my head in my hands. After a while I looked up at him and smiled sadly.

'Iss ka warran? Haji Dif, Iss ka warran?' (How are you?) then relapsing into English, 'I have not seen you for how many years, Haji?'

'Eight years, sahib. Now eat,' he continued eagerly, holding out a basket of fresh dates. 'Eat, sahib, for food is good 'gainst sorrow.'

But I couldn't eat, and the following day we continued the long march into Alula, where I met Paddy Penson, from whom I was to take over Alula for the last time.

Paddy, of course, had the griff. He knew the whole story, which by now was common gossip. I was poor company those few days, remaining silent and uncommunicative. The hand-over completed, I saw him off to Mogadishu.

The long days dragged on into weary weeks and yet wearier months. My sense of humour deserted me in my apathetic loneliness. I now hated safari, for visits to the little coastal villages only revived bitter-sweet memories and caused me the most acute unhappiness.

I now longed to leave Somalia, yet dreaded the finality of the inevitable parting.

Haji Dif left too. During the haggai, about a month before the Italians were due to arrive I saw him off to Hargeisha in British Somaliland, his home, where he would live with his family, his goat and camel herds.

My Somalia odyssey came to an end with the arrival of my Italian successor, a lieutenant in the Italian army, who flew in from Mogadishu by plane on the improvised landing-ground. He was young, about twenty-one, and spoke perfect English. We shook hands as I ushered him into the house.

'Have a drink, Tenente?' I pushed over the gin bottle.

'Grazie, no thank you, majore.' He smiled, a clean smile, a smile of youth and enthusiasm.

I smiled back at him and emptied the bottle.

The Guard of Honour was drawn up outside. The Italian flag was run up. They presented arms as the Union Jack slowly fluttered down. We saluted and shook hands again.

I gave the pilot instructions that I wished to leave immediately as I turned to board the plane.

'But majore,' my successor protested. 'What about the handing-over notes. What about this? What about that? What should I do?' He looked very young and unsure of himself.

'It is all on the files, Tenente,' I replied gently. 'Everything is on the files. The answer to this. The answer to that.' And everything was on the files, except——

I looked out to sea. As I stepped aboard the plane a few raindrops fell like tears from heaven on the sand and into the sea, the grey and empty sea.